

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX



D. LANGE

*Historical
Children's Books*

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ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX
Or
The Adventures of Two Boy Scouts on the
Minnesota Frontier.

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OR

The Adventures of Two Boy Scouts
on the Minnesota Frontier

BY

D. LANGE

ILLUSTRATED BY J. W. FERGUSON KENNEDY



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX

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INTRODUCTION

"On the Trail of the Sioux" was written primarily to supply an insistent demand made by the boys of my schools.

It has been evident to me, that, next to a wholesome, active physical life, nothing is so important in the development of a boy's character as the books he reads. In books he is looking for the heroes he would emulate, for the adventures he longs to experience, and thus, unknown to himself, his imagination is directed, his sympathies are stirred; in short, his character is built and fixed for life.

I ransacked several libraries for wholesome books that would "take" with the boys. Most of them they returned to me with the terse remark: "I don't like it."

"Haven't you any books about Indians?" was an often repeated question. It was difficult for me to get enough of the kind of Indian stories they should read that they would

read. Most books about Indians were either baldly historical, or were highly imaginary and so untrue to life that the reader, especially if a child, would inevitably get a false idea of both history and Indian nature.

It occurred to me that the Sioux outbreak in Minnesota in 1862 would make a striking setting for a story of adventure that might be interesting without distortion or exaggeration of facts.

I had talked with many of the actors in this stirring frontier drama. I knew the whole scene of the outbreak, and the following campaigns from Central Minnesota to the Missouri river. So I wrote for the boys this story of adventure. The history there is in it is true.

Few writers of fiction, to my knowledge, have ever used this desperate struggle of the brave and warlike Sioux tribes against the incoming tide of the white man's civilization. The reason doubtless is that the drama of the Indian frontier was eclipsed by the greater drama of the Civil War. But the frontier drama is well worth the efforts of a writer. About 1,200 well-armed Indians engaged in a

desperate effort to rid their hunting grounds of the invaders, and 800 white people lost their lives before the Sioux warriors could be driven back across the plains beyond the Missouri river.

D. LANGE.

St. Paul, Minn., June, 1911.

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ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX

CHAPTER I

THE OUTBREAK

"Look up the river, Joe. What's that smoke at Hudson's place?" asked Ken Henderson, with an anxious look on his face as he stopped a minute pitching hay from the wagon.

"I don't give a rap what it is, Ken," replied Joe McDonnell. "Hurry up; pitch up the rest of that hay. We'll never get done in time to go hunting for that buck."

But Ken seemed to be thinking of something else.

"Where's your gun, Joe?" he asked. "Is it loaded?"

"It's behind the stack with yours, and it's loaded, as it always is," retorted the boy above. "Come along with your hay! It'll be midnight before we're through, if you keep fooling along this way!"

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For a short time Ken, a slender fellow of fifteen, worked away in silence, while Joe, who was three years older, packed the hay carefully on the stack, so no rain could soak into it.

But that something seemed to press on Ken's mind. He glanced around anxiously.

"I can't think, Joe," he said, "what the settlers are burning at this time of the year. I've seen smoke in three places in an hour."

"Hay, hay—more hay!" called Joe. "I guess the settlers are burning some brush or weeds while the stuff is dry."

"Nonsense, Joe," Ken retorted quickly. "Settlers don't burn brush at this time—they stack hay and grain like we do."

"I don't care what they burn. Maybe it's old socks or rags. Now pitch hay, Ken, or get off the wagon and let me pitch."

Again both lads worked away as if their life depended on finishing the stack. But Ken could not long endure silence to-day.

"Joe," he began again, "they say the Sioux are ugly. They're making speeches and talking of fighting."

"The Sioux are always ugly, and always

jabber of fighting," said the older boy. "They are in camp at the agency, waiting for their money from the government. An Indian likes nothing better than to lie around in the shade and wait for something. They won't fight."

But Ken had stopped listening. For barely a moment he stood gazing at the box-elder grove that hid their home from view. Then he jumped off the wagon, exclaiming:

"Great God, our house is on fire, Joe!"

Joe slid from the stack as Ken leaped out of the wagon. Each boy seized his gun, jumped on his horse, and both raced for home as fast as the horses could go.

"Oh, it's only the straw-shed," gasped Joe, as they came close enough to see the blaze through the grove.

In his own mind Joe had been satisfied that his little foster-sister, Marjie, a child about seven years old, had started the fire while playing house in her favorite corner. Now both boys were puzzled to see neither Marjie nor Mrs. Henderson. They ran from the blazing shed to the house calling loudly for mother and Marjie. No answer came. For

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a moment the boys looked at each other in blank astonishment, then Joe, who now seemed the most excited, exclaimed:

“What on earth does it mean, Ken? Where are they?” And again he called, but there was no response.

Ken stood speechless, staring and pointing at an arrow stuck in the wall.

“Oh, Joe, Joe,” he stammered at last, “it’s the Sioux! The Sioux have broken out and have killed them! Just look around the place; we’ll find them dead and scalped!”

The boys searched the bushes and tall weeds for mother and child, but they found no trace of them.

“Ken,” said Joe, “don’t cry! If the Sioux have really gone on the warpath, they haven’t killed your mother and sister, but have taken them away alive. We should have found them if they were here. Let’s look for Indian tracks.”

It did not take the boys long to find the tracks of ten or twelve Indian ponies, that had come across the Cottonwood river just north of the house and had left again on the same trail.

“I am sure now,” said Ken, who had regained his composure, “that it’s the work of the Sioux. I thought of it all forenoon since we saw the smoke at Hudson’s and at Goose Lake. If only father were here, we’d rescue mother and Marjie, if we had to chase these rascally Sioux clear to the Rocky Mountains!”

“What makes you be so sure, Ken, that the Sioux have really gone to war against the whites? It would be an awful thing, because there are three thousand of them, and nearly all of them are well armed.”

“I’m sure,” answered Ken, “because last spring when White Eagle left us, after mother had nursed him through typhoid fever, I rode with him a few miles toward the Redwood Indian agency. You had gone to New Ulm the day before. He told me we ought to go away from here. The Indians wanted all their Minnesota land back again; they thought they had been cheated out of it. He had heard a warrior say if the whites didn’t leave, the Indians ought to kill all the men and keep the white squaws. I didn’t think much about his talk and didn’t tell you

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—I thought you'd laugh at me—and I did not tell mother because I did not want to scare her. She's been so much worried about father since he went south to the war and I couldn't bear to make her worry about our own safety."

"Don't feel bad about that, Ken," said Joe. "You did right not to tell mother, and we couldn't have done a thing, even if you had told me. We wouldn't have left the farm on such talk. Now, see here. You know my father used to be an Indian trader. I lived with the Sioux and Chippewas all my life until your parents adopted me and I know Indian ways pretty well. There must have been some of our friends in this band or they would have burned the house and killed us from ambush. They could have done it easy enough. Let's mount our horses and follow their trail."

"Then you think, too, that the Indians have gone on the warpath?" asked Ken.

"I can hardly believe it, and still they couldn't have acted this way unless they had begun war. I knew, of course, that they were dissatisfied with the last treaty, by which

their chiefs gave up the best hunting grounds in Minnesota. I also know that they are mad because their annuity is now several months overdue, and they know that most of our men have gone to the war and that the North has been getting the worst of it. But let's take up the trail. Your gun is loaded, isn't it?"

"Sure," replied Ken. "Both barrels."

"All right, then; let's not lose any more time."

Each boy hastily took the harness off his horse, and riding barebacked, they followed the trail of the Indians northward. Although both scanned every copse of hazel, sumach and wild plum with the utmost care, they saw no sign of Indians in the Cottonwood valley or in the ravine which they followed. Just at the foot of the bluff, where the trail led up to the open prairie, lay Marjie's blue rag doll. Ken dismounted to pick it up.

"Look here," he whispered, "we are on the right trail. And here is the track of our dog, Turk. He won't leave Marjie unless they kill him."

"We certainly are," replied Joe, "and it's a mighty dangerous trail, too. Whatever

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happens, we must keep cool. Don't shoot until I tell you. We must save our fire and one of us must always have a load of buckshot in reserve. If we fire all four barrels at once, they will rush in on us and have us scalped before we can reload."

With that they halted behind the last bush of sumachs and cautiously looked out over the open prairie before them. A flock of prairie chickens fluttered out of a low hazel thicket and startled them with their great noise and bluster. A little way up the trail two striped gophers were having a lively sparring match, while in every direction brown-eyed susans, goldenrods, purple thyme and other prairie flowers were swaying in the breeze. White summer clouds were slowly floating eastward; there was no sign of war or Indians anywhere, except the tracks of the ponies on the trail ahead.

Had the boys known what had actually happened and had they known the full extent of the danger surrounding them they would never have done what they did next. Twenty miles north of their home, the warriors of Chief Little Crow had started, with-

out warning, to kill or capture every white man, woman and child. Secret messages had been sent to the Chippewas and Winnebagoes and the Sioux believed that these two powerful tribes would make common cause with them. The three tribes could muster 8,000 well-armed warriors and Little Crow had planned to sweep Minnesota clean of white settlers.

After Joe had looked carefully in all directions, he said:

"All clear, Ken, follow me, but keep a sharp lookout," and he started northward on the trail. "We have to keep a good pace, if we want to overtake them before dark."

They had ridden scarcely half a mile when Ken called out:

"Indians, Joe; Indians! Look west of you!"

Joe instantly stopped his horse and saw ten or twelve mounted Indians just emerging over a ridge and riding towards them at a brisk pace. They were scarcely half a mile away, and Joe realized that there was no time for slow thinking.

"Turn about, Ken," he said. "We can't

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take any chances with that bunch on the open prairie. They are too many for us and some of them, no doubt, have rifles, so they would have us dead sure."

Both lads started for the head of the ravine as fast as the horses could run. When they had passed over the brow of the bluff, so the Indians could not see them, Joe reined in his horse, dismounted, gave the animal a sharp blow and called out: "Get up, Tom!" Ken instinctively followed Joe's example and both horses ran home down the ravine.

"Now, Ken," whispered Joe, "get under these sumach bushes quick! If these fellows are on the warpath, they'll be after us in a minute, and we'll have to fight them Indian fashion. Is your gun ready? Look at the caps."

"It's all right," said Ken; "I'm ready to fire as soon as you give the word."

For a few moments the boys knelt under the sumachs in breathless suspense, then the first Sioux rode cautiously over the edge of the bluff. Then another, and another, until Joe counted eleven of them.

"Ken, we're in for it," whispered Joe.

“Those fellows all have war-paint on. If they catch us, the squaws will dance around our scalps to-night. Take care you don’t fire both barrels at once.”

“You can depend on me,” whispered Ken, who was perfectly cool now. “There will be several dead Indians, before one of these painted heathens takes my scalp.”

By this time the first Sioux was not over fifty yards away. Several of them dismounted and Joe thought they were going to surround the bushes where he and Ken were hid.

“It’ll be all up,” he whispered, “if they once get under cover and start crawling up on us. We’ll die fighting, if we have to die. Give ’em a load, Ken—fire!”

Such a commotion as this shot produced among the stolid and grimly painted Indians, almost made the boys shout. One warrior fell off his pony, which galloped for the prairie, two other men reeled and clung to the manes of their horses, while several ponies reared and plunged about wildly.

Before the boys realized the effect of their fire, the wounded man had been picked up

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and the whole party of Indians were back on the bluff out of gun-shot reach.

"What do you suppose they'll do next?" asked Ken.

"We'll see pretty soon; they're holding a council. I bet they feel cheap for riding into a trap!"

"I hope that man who fell isn't dead," said Ken. "I'd hate to think I'd killed a man."

"Don't you bother about him, Ken. If he had hit you, he'd want you to be dead. Look, they're going to do something!"

"Are they going to attack us?"

"Watch 'em," replied Joe. "They're scattering along the bluff. Look out; get behind that rock as flat as you can, they're going to fire on us."

Half a dozen rifle balls whizzed through the sumach leaves and others were fired at random into the willows and wild currants on the small bottom below.

"Did you ever see such crazy shooting?" muttered Ken, with plain contempt in his voice.

"It isn't as wild as it looks. They don't know how many there are of us, and so they

are trying to draw our fire to find out. Our attack came so unexpected that they think we might have been the scouts of a larger party hid in the bushes below."

"I'd like to fire at that fellow near the choke-cherry bush, I think I could reach him. I put in a heavy charge of powder," said Ken, scarcely able to control his excitement.

"Don't you do it, Ken," warned Joe. "Your shot would never touch him, but it might cost us our lives. If they were sure there were only two of us, and both of us under this bush with no arms but shotguns, they'd dismount and crawl up on us from all sides, and our chances for keeping our scalps on would be pretty slim. We've put up a big bluff on these redskins, and must keep it up."

The Sioux were holding another council. When it was over they disappeared over the edge of the bluff.

"Hurrah!" cried Ken, "we beat that band. One general, one soldier, and one load of buckshot did it!"

"Keep still," warned Joe, speaking sharply. "Their leaving may be only a ruse. They may be watching us now."

CHAPTER II

GETTING READY FOR FLIGHT

AFTER the boys had lain quiet for an hour without hearing or seeing anything suspicious, it was decided that Joe should crawl to the upland to reconnoiter. Ken was to withdraw a little farther from the trail and conceal himself in a wild plum thicket so as not to be discovered by any Indians that might be passing on the trail. Under no circumstances was he to betray his presence unless actually attacked. After an hour Joe came back and reported that all was safe. The Sioux had evidently decided to let alone an enemy who was so well versed in the method of Indian warfare and they had ridden away to attack some unsuspecting and defenseless settlers.

After Joe had reported these things, the boys held a council of war. "One thing's sure," said Joe, "we've got to give up for

the present all attempts to rescue mother and Marjie. I guess all the Sioux have broken out. I only hope that the Chippewas and Winnebagoes won't join them, for if they do, they'll drive away or kill every white settler in Minnesota. We've got to save our own skins and we'll be lucky if we do that."

"You're right, Joe," replied Ken. "We can't do anything for mother and Marjie now except pray and trust in God; but for ourselves we can do some fighting in addition. Let's get out of these bushes, and ride to New Ulm."

"I've thought of that," answered Joe. "But the chances are ten to one that we would never get there. I'm afraid that bands of murderous Sioux are everywhere; and from what I know of Indian ways, I feel sure that they have ambushed every road and trail leading to New Ulm."

"We can't stay on our place, that's sure, for this war may last a year," argued Ken, "and some day or other the Sioux would burn us out, if they didn't get a chance to tomahawk us or shoot us."

"I've got a plan," replied Joe. "Let's

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go down the river in our old Indian canoe. In that way we can carry some blankets and food, and it won't matter whether it takes us one day or three."

"Joe, you must be crazy," retorted Ken. "Don't you see that every redskin could see us from the bluffs a mile away?"

"Oh, Ken, your French blood is boiling over now. You don't think I'm such a fool as to try to paddle down the Cottonwood in broad daylight! We'll travel at night and hide in the timber by day. If I judge right, the river's going to be as dark as ink to-night. Of course I know it'll be a dangerous trip all the same, but everything's dangerous now."

"That's different, Joe, and I think it's a great plan. Let's go home now and get ready. Say, Joe, I'm awfully hungry. Do you know that we have had nothing to eat since breakfast?"

It was now late in the afternoon and the boys at once prepared to leave the homestead as soon as darkness would cover their flight. Before getting ready they looked carefully through every room. Nothing was disturbed; nothing taken away.

"It's mighty queer," said Joe. "When the Indians go on the warpath they always take or smash things, and here nothing is—" He stopped suddenly and pointed at the door. "Oh, look at that," he whispered. "There's White Eagle's mark! A circle with an arrow through it. It is one of the secret signs we made up when we trapped together. It means, 'Danger, look out!'"

"Now I am sure the Indians have broken out. White Eagle tried to warn us but he couldn't, so he just left this sign. He'll do what he can for mother and Marjie, and sooner or later we'll find him or he'll find us. But now we must make haste to get away, for there is no telling when the next band of savages will come along."

The boys opened the hog pen and cattle yard so the animals could roam at will in search of food. But what to do with their horses, Tom and Jim, whom they loved almost as brothers, was a hard question. Finally they decided to hide them until evening in a thicket of willows, about a quarter of a mile from the house. To stay themselves in the house until dark they considered too dan-

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gerous, because they might be surprised any moment by Indians. As quickly as possible they carried a few necessary provisions, two blankets and some clothing to the willow thicket, and then hid the canoe and the two paddles in the same place. About \$30 in money, which Mrs. Henderson had fortunately concealed in a little box in an old stove where the Sioux had not looked for it, they divided between themselves, so that each one might have some in case, by some unforeseen accident, they should become separated.

These things done, they sat down to wait for darkness. They had been resting only a few minutes, when Ken began to feel ill. He complained of dizziness and said everything looked kind of black before his eyes, and he felt as if he was going to fall over.

"I know what ails you, Ken," said Joe. "Eat some of this bread and take a drink of water, and here's a piece of cold ham the Indians didn't find. This has been a pretty tough day for a boy of fifteen and you are just fainting with hunger."

As Ken began to eat and drink his faint-

ness left him. Joe also began to make a hearty meal on bread and cold ham.

The sun set while they ate, and now the night hawks, or bullbats, as the boys called them, began to circle back and forth over the prairie valley. Again and again they swooped playfully almost into the placid stream, which now flowed like a broad band of orange, red, gold and purple stretched out amongst picturesque groves of shrubs and trees. A catbird called from a near-by thicket, where he had feasted on the abundant wild grapes, and a fat badger startled the boys as he shuffled about under a plum tree thicket to pick up the overripe fruit.

Tears came into Ken's eyes as he looked steadily at the sunset sky. "It is just like Paradise," his mother had said only last night, "and when father comes back, we will call our farm Paradise Valley. I am not at all sorry that we came clear from Illinois in an ox wagon."

Now all was changed. As the shadows darkened and the purple sheen on the stream gradually turned to black, Ken thought he saw the dusky forms of Sioux warriors

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stealthily gliding out of the thickets here and there. He even imagined he could see the cat-like glare in their eyes.

At last it was night. Heavy clouds were slowly coming up from the south, but there was no wind and thousands of fireflies made the darkness seem yet darker.

"Let's get away, Joe," whispered Ken. "I feel as if a thousand Indians were spooking all around us."

"What are we going to do with the horses? We must do something right away."

"I know of only one thing," said Ken, "and that seems a crazy plan. We might start them on the Mankato road and they might possibly go to their former owner. You know father bought them of a man twelve miles down the road and they have been there several times since we had them. If we leave them at home the Sioux will get them, and I would rather shoot Jim than have him abused and starved by those fellows."

Joe thought the plan was as good as any. So each boy took his horse and rode him about a mile on the Mankato road. When they dismounted they gave the horses a smart

blow with a willow switch and heard them canter away in the darkness.

“When do you think they’ll get there?” asked Ken.

“Most likely never,” answered Joe. “The Sioux’ll catch them. It’s a shame, but we can’t help it; and they are worth three hundred dollars as they run.”

“It’ll take more than one Indian to catch Tom,” replied Ken eagerly. “You know he hates Indians and won’t allow one to come near him; and, when Tom runs, Jim’ll run.”

CHAPTER III

DOWN THE RIVER AT NIGHT

WHEN the boys came back to the river bank, carrying the light skiff, they were ready to start on their dangerous journey. As they began to feel chilly after the heat and excitement of the day, each added a coat to the scant clothing he wore. A few other pieces of extra clothing, a loaf of bread and a piece of bacon had been made up in two bundles and each firmly tied in a blanket. They had been especially careful with their guns. Each boy had examined his own before it grew too dark, because the percussion cap guns of that time were much more apt to miss fire than the present-day breech loaders. Now they wrapped a bandanna handkerchief around the hammers, partly to prevent an accidental discharge and partly to protect caps and powder from getting wet. Each boy carried a well-filled metal powder flask on a strap over his shoulder, while in the

pockets of his overalls he had a quantity of buckshot, a small tin box of caps and a piece of newspaper, for both powder and shot in the guns of that time had to be rammed down with a wad of paper.

All conversation had been carried on in a whisper.

"Most people have no idea," Joe had said, "how far a man's voice carries on the water at night."

When everything was ready Joe seated himself in the stern, where he could do the steering, while Ken took his seat in the bow. That was the way they always traveled when they hunted ducks and geese on the river or on the Big Slough south of their farm. Joe's gun pointed back and Ken's pointed forward.

"It's the muzzle of a gun that's dangerous," Mr. Henderson had told the boys. "Never have your gun point at anybody, unless you mean to kill him."

"Listen, Joe," said Ken. "What is that noise up the river? Sounds like a big wind in the trees."

"It's the rapids a mile above," answered Joe.

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"I never heard them at home," replied Ken.

"Of course you didn't because you were always asleep in bed at this time."

"My, don't they make an awful noise! Any rapids ahead of us?"

"I don't know, Ken. I never was over the whole stretch between here and New Ulm. We have to be on the watch for them. Now let's push off. Take care you don't splash and don't touch the boat with your paddle. There's no telling how close to the river some of those Sioux bands may be camping."

The next moment they were gliding noiselessly along with a fair current. To the north the stars were shining brightly, but the southern half of the sky was overcast with clouds and every now and then distant lightning gleamed through the elms and maples on their right. The foreboding stillness of the air was broken now and then by puffs of wind, which shook and rustled the tall sunflowers and ragweeds on the bank and swayed the long grape-vines hanging over the water.

For a mile or more the canoe had moved

along like a specter, in absolute silence. Then Ken could no longer bear the strain.

“Joe,” he whispered, “I guess I’m a coward. I’m so scared I feel like jumping out and running home. If I could only holler or fire off my gun! It seems to me I see an Indian or a spook in about every black corner ashore.”

“Don’t be afraid, Ken,” said Joe with a friendly voice. “I feel a little bit the same way, but it is only that we’re worked up in our minds. The Sioux are rolled up in their blankets and we mustn’t wake them. How dark it’s getting and those clouds look as black as pitch. But we’re making good time going with the current. Aren’t you getting sleepy and tired?”

“Not a bit, Joe. I’ve seen enough Indians and spooks to-night to keep me awake for a month; but I’m getting over my scare now. I feel mad at myself for being so scared.”

“Well, it is scary,” said Joe. “It’s so dark that I’ve been feeling all along as if the river came to an end a rod or two ahead of us.”

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After awhile Joe whispered, "Is the boat leaking much?"

"Only a little, Joe," said Ken. "I guess I fixed every hole."

"Then we're all right; no need of worrying."

On went the boat in its silent flight. The skillfully handled paddles made not even a ripple, and nothing but the steady, gliding motion of the skiff told that two anxious boys were pursuing their dangerous journey in the dark and bloody country of the Sioux.

The storm came up fast. The whole sky was now overcast, and an inky blackness lay over the river and its narrow valley. Great sheets of lightning began to shoot northward on hurrying, whirling clouds, and made the river and the tall cottonwoods fairly spring out of the dark with a distinctness staring and specter-like. Overhead the thunder rumbled incessantly, while on the prairie to the south sharp reverberating crashes made the hills tremble and awakened the echoes from the bluffs.

"It's an awful night," whispered Joe, "but for us it's better than stars and moon-

light. What is that dull roaring sound on the prairie, Ken?"

"Heavy wind or hail, I suppose," answered Ken. "It makes me feel creepy again. I hope mother and Marjie are under some shelter."

"You may be sure they are, Ken. The Indians do not move about in this kind of weather. We'd better keep right on going. Put the bundle over the hammers of your gun, so your caps don't get wet. If we have to shoot, it'll be shooting for life."

Then the storm broke on the valley. The willows bent almost to the ground, the wild hazel and sumachs beat and switched as if they would leave the narrow valley and fly northward with the storm over the open prairie. The big cottonwoods, elms, and maples stood out like bent flagpoles, with all their leaves quivering and fluttering with the rushing storm.

The rain came; not a few drops, but a whipped and whirling spray; then torrents; then driving, splashing sheets. And from out of the darkness and the splashing down-pour and the roar of the wind shot blinding

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streaks of lightning, instantly followed by the deafening crashes of thunder.

“Joe, the boat’s filling with rain,” called Ken.

“Well, we can’t stop here. Don’t let her get on the north shore.”

A flash and a crash came almost at the same moment. One-half of a giant cottonwood swashed into the river with an awful plunge just a few feet ahead of the boat. Ken fell back with a thud against Joe’s feet. A big wave almost swamped the boat, and Joe barely swung it towards shore before it sank on a sand bar.

Standing in the sunken boat, Joe pulled Ken out of the water. “Ken,” he cried, “wake up, wake up! Oh! is he dead? Wake up, Ken; wake up!” and he shook the limp, wet boy as hard as he could.

At last Ken sat up, with the current to his armpits. “Stop, Joe!” he cried. “You are sinking the boat. Where are we? What’s happened to me?”

“Ken, you gave me the worst scare of my life. You were stunned by lightning. I thought you were dead.”

"I heard you tell me to keep away from the north shore, and that's the last I knew."

"The lightning split a big tree. Just look for it at the next flash."

Joe had scarcely spoken when another flash revealed the split tree looming high in ghostly whiteness, while the boughs of the other half were swaying in the current just ahead of the boat.

When the boat began to sink, Joe's first thought was about the guns, and he threw them on the bank. Then, when Ken had revived, he waded ashore and placed them out of the rain in the shelter of a big leaning maple. The barrels were half full of water, but Joe said that wouldn't hurt them any.

"We might as well stay awhile in this shelter," said Joe. "Such a cloudburst as this would soon fill up our boat and we would probably get our caps and powder wet, then we'd be helpless if the Sioux attacked us."

For half an hour the storm and rain continued with unabated fury. All around them glaring flashes of lightning blinded their eyes and crashes of thunder like cannon shook the earth.

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"I have been out in many a storm, but this is the worst I ever saw," said Joe. "It looks as if all the bad Indian spirits had got loose."

"I bet our hay stack is soaked through," remarked Ken, "if it isn't blown away. But I think this is fun. I often wished I could go and live with the Indians like you did, and now I think we are living like Indians. If I only knew mother and Marjie were alive and not suffering, I'd be happy."

"The more I think about it the surer I am that mother and Marjie are alive."

"Good Lord! see that!" interrupted Joe. "Our boat's going down stream!"

And with that he jumped into the river and disappeared. Ken sprang to the bank, his heart in his throat. A feeling of sudden calamity fell upon him. Storm and rain had abated, but he could distinctly hear many torrents falling over the bluffs, while at his feet the swollen river surged past with ill foreboding gurglings. He stared into the darkness and strained every nerve to catch a sound of Joe, but there was no sound except that of prairie torrents and the ominous rush

of the river. What should he do if the stream had swallowed Joe? The lightning played overhead, but it served only to show him the terrifying swiftness of the current. The clear, placid Cottonwood in which he and Joe had enjoyed many a long swim, rushed on as if it had gone mad.

It took all the self-control he could muster not to shout for Joe or his mother or God. In these moments of utter desertion the boy prayed for his friend Joe, for mother, father and sister as he had never prayed before. He uttered no words, but it seemed he saw and heard his mother reading from the family Bible, "And if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death." Many a time had he heard her read the passage and had seen the tears come to her eyes, and he knew that she was thinking of his father and praying for him as she read. He felt that even now she was praying for himself and Joe, and his mind was still on this when he heard a movement among the trees. He listened; it was no mistake; and the sound was coming nearer. His heart beat fast.

“That you, Joe?” he asked in an excited whisper.

The next moment he was hugging and swinging Joe around under the dripping willows.

“Swimming with your boots and clothes on is different from swimming the way we did up home,” said the wet boy. “I didn’t seem to be able to raise my feet against that awful current and was almost played out when I caught the boat. I tied her about ten rods below, just around the bend. We’d better start now. It’s not raining very hard any more; but a barrel of water couldn’t make us any wetter than we are.”

The boys took their guns and bundles and walked slowly through tall grass, weeds and brush, literally feeling their way in the darkness.

Once more embarked on the river they ran very carefully and did not try to go much faster than the current took them. The storm had thrown not a few trees into the river and the boys were afraid of upsetting their boat on a snag. Thus they floated along for several hours. Neither boy said much;

each was busy with his paddle and his own thoughts. The wind was gradually veering around to the northwest, clearing the sky, but also bringing a chilly draft down on the boys, whenever they passed an open, unwooded place.

It was about three in the morning when Joe told Ken to be on the lookout on the south side for some small creek or tributary into which they might take the boat and then hide it in some thicket.

“We must be off the river and in some safe hiding-place before dawn,” he added, “because that’s the time Indians begin to stir. If we can we ought to hide on the south bank, for I think most of the Sioux are on the north side of the river.”

CHAPTER IV

ASHORE, WITH INDIANS ALL AROUND

It was not long before they discovered a small stream joining the Cottonwood from the south. They pushed their skiff up this stream as far as possible. When the water became so shallow that the skiff would no longer float they pushed it under a thicket of wild plums and grape-vine, which concealed it so completely that it could not be seen unless one actually crawled into the thicket. After securing the boat the boys followed the stream to the upland and decided to remain concealed under a similar clump of plum trees which had grown up on the edge of the timber. From this position they could see everything that passed on the prairie before them without being seen themselves. Their clothing had almost dried on their bodies, but in passing through the brush and tall weeds they had again been wet to the skin

and were so chilled by the raw air of approaching dawn that they shivered and their teeth chattered.

“If we could only make a fire now,” remarked Ken, “we would be comfortable.”

“No fire on this trip,” replied Joe, “unless we want to pay for it with our scalps.”

Ken now rolled himself up in his blanket, and in less than five minutes he was fast asleep. Joe deemed it his duty to remain on watch, but the fatigue from the night’s trip soon became so great that he lay down and, against his will, also fell asleep.

Suddenly he felt as if the hands of an Indian were moving over his face. Now the hand took hold of his hair, trying to lift his scalp, and with a whoop Joe sat bolt upright, reaching for his gun and staring wildly for the red man. There was no red man. At his side Ken was lying in the same position he had taken before dawn, but a few feet away a saucy chipmunk squinted and scolded at him while he peeped around a plum tree.

“You pesky munk!” said Joe, “you walked over my face and gave me an awful scare; but I guess it is about time to wake up.

“Wake up, Ken! Are you going to sleep all day?”

He gave the boy a good punch.

“Ah, quit it, Joe; quit it,” drawled Ken. “We can’t stack hay to-day, the stuff’s too wet. Let me sleep.”

“We won’t make any hay to-day,” said Joe, “but we may have to make some Sioux scalps,” and he gave Ken another punch.

The words “Sioux scalps,” caused Ken to sit up and rub his eyes.

“My, but I slept sound!” he said. “I wonder what time it is.”

“It must be about 9 o’clock,” answered Joe. “I meant to watch, but I fell asleep. I just couldn’t help it.”

The boys looked over the prairie from their concealment and not seeing any danger, began to satisfy their hunger, eating what little bread and raw bacon remained to them. Being thirsty they crept cautiously down to the little stream on which they had concealed their boat. They saw and heard no signs of Indians. Numerous birds were flitting through the bushes and the August

sun was blazing on a profusion of sunflowers, goldenrods and other wild flowers.

“Joe,” said Ken, “I think we’re a couple of idiots. Look around; this don’t look like war. I don’t believe there’s an Indian in the whole valley. I bet you and I have made up this whole war scare.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, at least don’t talk it so loud,” whispered Joe. “You’ll see plenty of war signs before sunset. We’ll crawl up to the prairie road and see what we can see.”

They picked their way with the utmost care, Joe pushing his gun ahead of him and Ken trailing it behind. No stick was snapped and no bushes were caused to sway. After half an hour’s tedious work they stood up in a clump of choke cherries.

“Gee!” whispered Ken. “It feels good to stand up again. I never kept so still when sneaking up on a deer as I crawled along for these cherry trees. Aren’t the cherries big? I’m going to bend down a few of the best trees. I’m hungry again.”

“Not on your life, Ken! If there is a

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Sioux within a quarter of a mile he would see these bushes move and shoot us before we knew what happened. Crawl on a little so we can see the road.”

There were tracks in the soft black dirt—a wagon trail and the marks of pony hoofs, moccasins and shoes.

Joe’s face was gloomy.

“Bad news,” said he. “Indians on horseback, Indians on foot and several white women. The shape and size of the shoe tracks show plainly that they were made by white women. They’re too small and narrow for white men, and the Sioux women never wear shoes.”

“But how about the wagon?” inquired Ken.

“That’s not so easy to explain. Very few Indians at the Lower Agency have wagons. I’m afraid they stole the wagon of some white man—maybe after they killed him. The tracks show that the wagon was heavily loaded. They probably used it to carry away their plunder, a lot of lazy bucks piled on it, and they may have allowed some white women and children to ride.”

“No white men’s tracks?”

“No,” said Joe. “The Indians don’t capture men; they kill them. Sometimes they kill the women and children, and sometimes they carry them off—it just depends on how they feel. But let’s crawl back to the thicket, it’s too dangerous here.”

Their plans were indefinite, except on this point, that they should make no noise; they wanted to get through the day unobserved, and to go on down stream in the night. It wasn’t to be as quiet a day as they thought it would be.

They had been lying still for about an hour when they heard the sound of wagons. With breathless suspense they watched two teams driving by. Four Indians and five white women were on the wagons, while six Indians followed on horseback, not on scrawny Indian ponies, but on large, well-fed farm horses.

This meant more to Joe than it did to Ken. Joe knew Indians and Indian nature. His life with the red man had taught him many things. Some of these things he whispered to his companion.

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“That’s a pretty good sign that the whole Sioux Nation has gone on the warpath,” he said. “They’ve been sore about not getting their money from the government, and White Eagle told me several weeks ago that if his brothers ever got started killing they’d all join in. I’ll bet that from Iowa to the Chippewa country, and from Big Stone Lake to the Big Woods, near Mankato and St. Peter, every white man is either fleeing or fighting for his life. If the Chippewas and Winnebagoes have joined the Sioux, they can take every town west of the Mississippi, and I wouldn’t be surprised if they swooped down upon St. Paul. The few companies of regular soldiers in the state are scattered at Fort Snelling, Fort Ridgely and Fort Ripley. Those forts are over a hundred miles apart, and they can’t get word from one to another except by messenger, on foot or horseback. The reds know this.

“And did you see that those fellows who passed here had better guns than the settlers have?”

The boys knew now that they were in a position of great danger.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and while both boys began to be tortured with hunger, they were without a mouthful of food. Wild plums and hazelnuts were abundant all around. They had eaten liberally of these, but the more they ate the hungrier they seemed to get and they were afraid of making themselves sick with these palatable but unsubstantial foods.

"It's all right for squirrels and blue jays," Ken remarked, "but it will never do for us; we must find something more solid."

Half a mile up the road was a small patch of corn and the boys crept towards this, hoping to find more nourishing food. In this expectation they were not disappointed. The corn was just in the milk and although they had to eat it uncooked and unsalted it appeased their craving stomachs.

"What are we going to have for breakfast?" asked Ken.

"It'll be more green corn, as far as I can see," replied Joe. "Let's take a supply of it."

Their few pockets were soon filled and they tied the sleeves of their coats with strings

of Indian hemp, hoping to be able to carry away at least a day's rations.

Just as they were ready to steal back into the woods something happened which filled them with consternation.

A large party of Sioux with ponies, three wagon loads of plunder and many captives appeared in sight from the west and proceeded to encamp for the night. Some camped right opposite the cornfield, one band stayed above it and another settled down near a little stream some distance below the field.

At first the boys were very much afraid that some of the numerous Indian dogs might take up their trail and betray the fugitives to the red warriors. However, the dogs seemed to be tired from a long day's march and no sooner had their masters made camp than the dogs curled up and went to sleep.

After talking over their perilous position, Joe gave it as his opinion that the plan of continuing their journey down the Cottonwood that night would have to be given up. Even if they should reach the woods safely they could not hope to get their boat into the

river undiscovered, for five Sioux were encamped only a few rods from the hiding place of their skiff and would hear the slightest noise.

Moreover, Joe had now gotten his bearings of the land around and knew that all the Indians they had seen had been traveling toward Butternut Ford, two miles below. This ford was a famous crossing and camping place of the Sioux and Joe felt certain that a large party was encamped there right on the brink of the river and that the chances of a boat passing their camp undetected would be very few.

In spite of all these risks Ken was disposed to steal back to the boat and try for the river, but Joe would not hear of it.

“As long as we stay hid we’re safe,” he said. “Once they catch sight or sound of us, our lives are not worth a red copper.”

After a little more argument Ken submitted to Joe’s judgment and the two friends sat down at the south edge of the cornfield. They saw the reddening sun go down lower and lower until it disappeared behind the hills which rose like enormous waves on the end-

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less prairie. For half an hour more they sat in silence and watched the changing tints of the western sky. The gold and orange slowly melted into an intense red; by invisible degrees the red softened into purple and then the darkness of night settled over the plain and changed the emerald of the prairie into an indefinable landscape of mist and hazy swells over which the summer stars twinkled and glittered. On a near-by slough the water hens called and spattered and flocks of wild ducks quacked and flapped, while from a distant swale came the melancholy, long-drawn howl of a wolf.

“Joe,” whispered Ken, “I don’t think I ever heard so many noises. If I was alone, I’d feel so scared and creepy that I’d run plumb into some Indian and be scalped. I wonder where father and mother and Marjie are to-night? Perhaps they are all dead and you and I are alone in the world.”

“Don’t get gloomy, Ken,” said Joe, forcing a laugh. “Come, let’s crawl up on those Indians and see what they’re doing.”

Slowly they crept along between the rows of corn whose broad green blades rustled in

a soft breeze, concealing any slight noise the lads might make.

Three Indians were sitting around the camp fire and smoking in silence, while a number of dark forms could be seen lying asleep under the shelter of some low trees.

“Well,” whispered Joe, “one thing is sure, there’s no whisky in the camp. I almost wish they had a few jugs full, then they would soon be so drunk that we could get to our boat with safety.”

After watching the Indians for some time the boys sneaked back to the southern edge of the field. The sky was almost cloudless and the night grew so chilly that it was impossible for them to sleep on the bare ground, and their blankets had been left under the plum trees. They cuddled close together and shifted from one place to another. The loose black soil below them was comfortably warm, but the night air was so damp and raw that again and again they rose with a shiver.

At last they decided to leave the cornfield and seek a more comfortable sleeping place. On the south side of the big slough a small grove could be seen set off against the sky

like a low black cloud. The boys knew this to be the homestead of one of the thrifty German settlers of whom so many had come to break the rich black soil of Minnesota. To this grove they made their way by a wearisome detour around the big slough.

Although they now had less fear of falling in with Indians, they spoke only in whispers, as much from habit as from necessity, and each boy carried his gun ready for action. As they cautiously entered the dark grove of box elders they could see in the dim light the door of the small house standing wide open.

"The red devils got in their work here all right," remarked Joe. "It shows what would have happened to us if we had stayed at home."

Near the edge of the grove lay a small straw stack and the tired fugitives were about to dig themselves into it, when two black grunting monsters jumped up right under their feet. Ken was knocked over by one of them and his gun flew off into the bushes. Joe stood speechless for a moment, then he exclaimed, "Donner and Blitzen! Those pigs gave me the worst scare I ever had in

my life! A hundred Indians wouldn't have made my heart jump any faster."

"Mighty good luck, Joe!" replied Ken, picking himself out of the weeds. "If that pig hadn't knocked me over, I'd have shot at him and brought the whole tribe of Indians down on us. My heart's thumping yet."

Recovered from their fright, they decided that a straw stack that was safe for the pigs was safe for boys and as neither of them felt any desire to enter the deserted house, they covered themselves with a thick layer of dry straw, placed their guns handy and were soon warm and comfortable.

CHAPTER V

ON DOWN STREAM—AND A SHIPWRECK

WHEN they awoke it was daylight. A rooster was crowing merrily and a small flock of chickens were scratching in the straw in front of the stable. At first the boys scouted around in the grove to make sure that none of their red enemies were in the neighborhood. Ken climbed one of the low trees and could see that the Indians who had camped on the margin of the timber had all left.

"I believe the rogues have gone to attack New Ulm or Fort Ridgely," said Joe. "The whole bunch was going somewhere. I do wish we could know just what's happening."

Having decided that there was no danger for the present they began to look around for something to eat. But the whole house had been ransacked and they found nothing edible except a bag of cornmeal and a little tea.

“That looks like green corn and dry corn for breakfast,” observed Joe.

“It isn’t going to be all corn,” retorted Ken. “Those hens must have hidden some eggs somewhere. I’m going on a hunt for them,” and Ken disappeared into the stable.

The first thing he saw was two big oxen lying dead at the manger, each with a bullet hole in the shoulder. It was not long, however, before he returned to Joe with a hat full of eggs.

“Are you sure there aren’t any chicks in them?” Joe teased him. “You remember the eggs you found in your mother’s garden and took along when we went duck hunting. Are you going to eat them raw? You know there can’t be any fire on this trip.”

“Why can’t we make a small fire of dry sticks that will make almost no smoke? It’s windy enough so a little bit of smoke will not show.”

Joe could not refute these arguments and in a few minutes Ken had a bright fire burning on the ground. A small kettle was brought from the house for boiling the eggs

and for making the tea, and another one for hot cornmeal mush.

It did not take much time to make the meal; it took still less to eat it.

The meal over, the two exiles talked over their next move. As their guns had been through so much rain, the boys were afraid the powder might have got wet in spite of their precautions. To test the guns by firing them, which would have been the simplest way, was out of the question, as the sound would carry too far and might attract the Sioux scouts. It was necessary, therefore, to draw the charges and reload. The powder in Joe's gun was perfectly dry, but the loads in Ken's were so damp that they would probably have missed fire.

"We're certainly green to fool around here and make breakfast before looking over our guns," declared Joe with some emphasis. "After this we examine our guns every morning, noon and evening. I wouldn't mind fighting Indians, but I should hate to be caught with my gun missing fire."

Feeling certain that their guns were ready for any emergency, they once more went

through the house to see if there was anything there that might be of use to them, and they finally made up a small lot of provisions to take on their journey. It consisted of a small bag of cornmeal, a dozen cobs of green corn, a hatful of boiled eggs, a small tin box of salt and a little tea. If Dutch Henry had possessed any sugar or other eatables, the Indians had taken it all. One other thing they took along—a small line and a few fish hooks. Their own tackle had been forgotten in their hurry to get away safely.

The day passed very slowly. Again and again one or the other climbed a tree and scanned the road and timber a mile north, but not a human being was to be seen anywhere; the country appeared deserted. Immense flocks of blackbirds whirled over Dutch Henry's cornfield and feasted on the milky kernels. On the big slough the boys could see thousands of ducks and water hens, but there was no sign of either white man or red. Ken suggested that they walk over to the timber, but Joe would not hear of it.

“Just because we don't see any Indians is no sign there aren't any,” he protested.

“It’s as likely as not some of their scouts are hiding somewhere in the edge of the timber, and if we try to cross the prairie they would see us and ambush us, and we’d be dead then for sure.”

Ken suggested that they kill a couple of chickens so as to have some fresh meat for the remainder of their journey, but Joe argued against it.

“If we made a fire big enough to boil or roast chickens,” he said, “the smoke would give us away; and we wouldn’t care to eat them raw as long as we have the other things to satisfy our hunger.”

When night came with its friendly cover of darkness the fugitives started for the timber. They found their blankets and skiff undisturbed and soon were once more gliding down stream. The river was still running so full from the heavy rains that they found it hard work to follow the main current and not get stranded on the flooded banks.

Instead of the ashy, whirling clouds of Monday night, a clear starlit sky arched over the valley and the prairie. The long-stemmed leaves of poplars and cottonwood

trees hung limp in the still night air. It was this very peace and stillness of nature which made Joe especially watchful and alert for the slightest noise, because every sound was magnified and distorted in this oppressive silence of a perfect summer night.

The murmuring of the water among some flooded willows caused Joe to strain his ears; he thought it was the noise of a canoe coming up against the current. A little screech owl hooted in a dark clump of box-elders and Joe, listening with suspended breath, tried to decide whether the sound really came from the little brown night bird or whether it was the signal call of a Sioux.

About midnight the two boatmen entered upon a stretch of water so swift that they stopped paddling and simply guided the skiff.

"This is great traveling, Joe," whispered Ken. "At this rate we'll be in St. Paul by morning, and we—"

He didn't finish. The bow grated on a submerged boulder and rose high out of the water, while the stern sank low.

Before either boy had time to think or act, Joe fell over backward into the swift current.

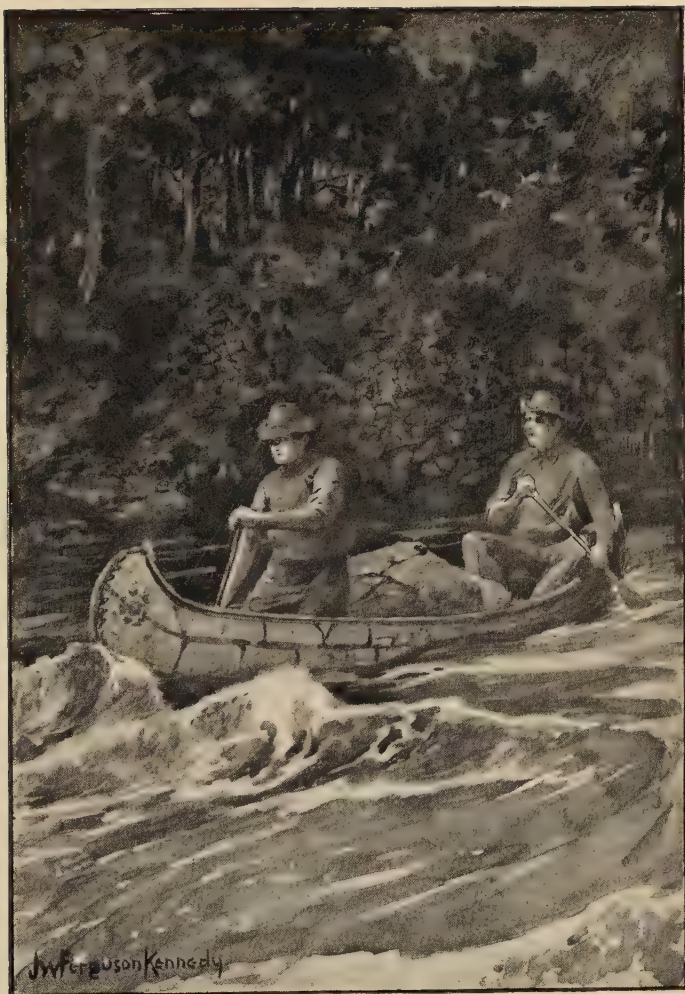
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Ken, seeing the filled boat swinging around and sinking, boldly jumped into the current, holding his gun high over his head. Contrary to his expectations, he struck bottom. He quickly waded ashore, leaned his gun against a tree and struck out after the boat. He got it, and pushed it ashore. Joe, who had also reached shore, swam instinctively after the paddles, and caught both.

"Now what do you call this?" he asked, as he stood dripping on the bank.

"A regular shipwreck," answered Ken. "Joe, you said some Indian cuss-word when you went down."

"Maybe I did," admitted Joe. "I went so fast that I didn't have time to think in English. It's a pretty bad mess, all right. All our grub's gone. To-morrow we can feed on wild plums and grasshoppers. Our blankets and extra clothing are gone, and if we want to hang our things up to dry, we can march around in the woods like Adam in Eden. And where's my hat? That's gone, too. Let's hurry up and get started again; maybe we can find the blankets before they draw water enough to sink."



"THIS IS GREAT TRAVELING, JOE," WHISPERED KEN.—Page 53.

On the river again, they kept a sharp lookout along both shores. A quarter of a mile down stream, where the rapids ceased, they found one of the blankets. The other blanket and Joe's hat were not recovered. They had either sunk or lodged under some brush where the boys could not find them in the feeble light of the stars.

"Take care of your gun now," spoke Joe to Ken. "Mine isn't any better than a club, until I draw the charge and reload."

After the accident they followed the channel without further difficulty. The valley of the river became gradually wider and the timber grew heavier. Joe was well acquainted with this part of the river and he estimated that they were about fifteen miles from New Ulm, when the first indications of daylight appeared on the sky ahead of them. The boys now concealed their boat with the same care as after their first night's journey. Joe reloaded his gun and Ken examined his. Then they picked their way to the bluff above the valley and for their own hiding place selected the shelter of a fallen elm, whose dead branches were overgrown with a tangle

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of wild grapes and woodbine. Their clothing had become thoroughly drenched again by the dew-laden brush and both were suffering in the cold morning air.

The sun rose red behind the trees and under its warming rays the spirits of the young fugitives revived. They wrung the water out of their blanket, wrapped it around themselves and sat down, leaning against a fallen log. There was not a mouthful to eat in camp and nothing to do but to watch in silence the sparkling of the dew.

Peace seemed to be resting over the woods. Above them in the boughs of a tall maple a little warbler was singing its sweet lay. The other woodland birds were silent at this season. At a distance they heard a noise, which startled Ken.

"Listen!" said he. "It's a squaw cutting firewood."

"Oh, nonsense," replied Joe with a laugh, "it's the big black logcock getting his breakfast. I wish we could get our breakfast as easy."

Then there was another noise. They sat up erect and each seized his gun as if by com-

mand. The noise came nearer. It was something walking or running. After a few moments a big buck crossed over an open lane scarcely fifty yards below them.

“There goes a hundred pounds of fine hot venison,” remarked Ken, “while we are shivering here with empty stomachs.”

“Just watch his trail,” retorted Joe. “I think you’ll see something else pretty soon. That buck isn’t on a pleasure stroll; something’s following him.”

There was another slight noise in the brush, a very slight noise. Then an Indian armed with a new gun stepped out on the lane and cautiously started toward the boys’ bower.

“The moment he sees us he is a dead Indian,” whispered Joe, and noiselessly cocked his gun and rose on his knees.

The Indian meanwhile, seeing that he had lost the trail, stood still a moment as if listening for a sound. He looked at the woodbine tangle where the boys were, but as no trail led in that direction he walked back and picked up the buck’s trail where it left the lane.

“A close call,” said Joe, breathing freely again.

“For us or for the Indians?” asked Ken.

“For both, I reckon. There’s no telling how many Indians would have crawled out of these woods if we had fired on this one.”

“What do you suppose this fellow is doing here all alone? The Sioux don’t have to hunt now—stealing cattle and pigs is easier.”

“He’s a scout, I think,” was Joe’s answer, “and he jumped the buck by accident. You see now that no man can tell when he is going to fall in with Indians. There may not be one within ten miles, and there may be fifty within half a mile of you any time. You can’t see ’em any more than you see the wolves and lynxes of the forest. We haven’t been any too careful.”

CHAPTER VI

A RESCUE, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LONE GROVE CAMP

HOURS passed with no outward disturbance, but the lads felt the torment of growing hunger. They ate some wild plums and grapes and opened a few handfuls of hazelnuts with their hunting knives because they feared to betray themselves to some lurking Indian scout if they cracked them.

About midway between noon and evening they saw a group of persons slowly approaching the timber from the south. As the group came a little nearer Joe thought there were three Indians and a white woman with a child, and said so.

"How do you know at this distance that the woman is white?" Ken asked with surprise.

"A squaw," said Joe, "would have her papoose or bundle strapped on her back; this woman is carrying something in her arms.

Now keep cool, Ken. There may be some work for us."

The Indians came nearer and nearer, and finally the whole group rested under a spreading oak near the road, where they evidently intended to camp for the night. They were scarcely thirty yards from the boys' hiding place, and both Joe and Ken watched their every movement. The men laid down their guns and began to smoke. The white woman went a little aside with the child, who was fretful and restless. She was offering him something to eat, but the child cried and wouldn't take it.

The woman left the child and sat down on the other side of the camp, her back turned to the child, who continued to cry. Quietly the tallest Indian arose, took his tomahawk and walked towards the child, evidently annoyed by its crying.

"What's he going to do?" Ken whispered under his breath.

Joe did not answer.

"Lie low and reserve your fire," he admonished with a voice that betrayed the tension of his feelings. The next moment his gun

boomed and the tall Indian pitched forward into the grass. He had raised his tomahawk above the child; the blow never fell.

His two companions jumped to their feet and fired point blank at the puff of smoke in the dogwood brush. Almost at the same instant Joe fired his other barrel at the two Indians who were standing close together. One of them reeled and fell into a clump of hazel; the other jumped high into the air with a terrible yell. Joe and Ken rushed out of their cover with their hunting knives drawn. The wounded red man ran for the prairie, but as soon as he was out of range he stopped and loaded his gun—a thing an Indian never forgets.

Joe, however, was too well versed in Indian tactics to allow him any advantage. Without first paying attention to the rescued child or its mother, he had Ken quickly reload the discharged shot gun, while he put a charge of ball and powder into the better guns of the killed Indians. Then Joe and Ken followed on the trail of the fleeing Indian.

“He’s hard hit,” said Joe, as he pointed at the blood on the grass, and then watched

the limping Sioux, who now turned his course westward.

“What could we do for him?” asked the warm-hearted Ken. “Can’t you shout to him and tell him that white men don’t harm a wounded soldier if he gives up his arms?”

“Not I,” retorted Joe. “I wouldn’t trust him, and he wouldn’t trust me. An Indian warrior gives no quarter and expects no quarter. Watch him, although he’s badly wounded, he’s going to score a point on us.”

“How?”

“See him turning north towards the timber? Well, when he gets into the timber, we’ve got to get away from it, or inside of an hour you or I will have that bullet under our skin which he put in his gun. If he’s not hurt too much he’ll start at once for our camp. We’ve got to move fast.”

On returning to the camp they learned that they had rescued the little boy and wife of a young German farmer, a Mr. Hammerle, whose home had been near Lake Shetec. The Indians had killed him three days before, while he was stacking wheat. The woman, with her child, had fled into the cornfield, but

the Sioux had found them and made them prisoners.

She could not find words to thank the boys, but again and again she pressed her child close to her, and when she learned that the boys had a mother and sister prisoners among the Indians she said with tears in her eyes that she would pray for their protection and safe return.

There was, however, little time for talking. The boys quickly secured the blankets, the ammunition, a copper kettle and a bag of pemmican from the dead Sioux.

Joe was in high spirits, because two good guns made them so much stronger against any attack. When each boy had swung a light load on his back and made sure that his gun was ready for immediate use, the party walked around a point of timber and then struck out across the prairie for a small isolated grove a mile to the east.

They selected this place because they knew that the wounded Indian, if he were still alive, could not see them enter it, and, as the grove was surrounded by open prairie, no one could approach it without being discovered.

It was decided to camp in this place for the night, because Mrs. Hammerle and her little boy, Robert, were utterly tired out by their long journey. Joe did not think it safe to take to the boat that night, for the escaped Indian was likely to be in hiding near.

In the grove the boys felt fairly secure. They had now two good shotguns and two good rifles with a fair supply of ammunition for each, which meant that they could fire six shots without reloading. Mrs. Hammerle assured them that she could load the guns if necessary, and as they were sure that they could not be ambushed they concluded to make preparations for a night's rest.

Before they went to work, however, they had a good meal of pemmican, and Ken thought it was the best thing he had ever eaten. The pemmican was dried buffalo meat preserved in about one-third of tallow, and, although Ken never would touch fat meat at home, at the Lone Grove Camp he ate meat and suet with relish.

The simple meal being finished the boys fell to work making camp. Cutting a number of poplar poles and a lot of brush they built

two low lean-tos, one for Mrs. Hammerle and little Robert and one for themselves. To make the lean-tos extra warm and cozy they covered the brush with long grass which they secured in place by a few heavy branches placed on top of it. Built in this manner each lean-to afforded shelter against wind and dew and would even shed a good rain.

The little boy and his mother were given two blankets, and were soon sound asleep beneath their green shelter and under the protection of the lads.

Joe and Ken had some argument as to who should enjoy the first sleep under their comfortable lean-to. Ken insisted that it was his turn to watch, if any watching was necessary, and finally Joe yielded to him, saying, "All right, Ken. You can watch until about midnight. Walk around slowly inside the poplars without exposing yourself. Keep a sharp eye on those willow bushes toward the north, and, if you hear or see anything suspicious, come quick and call me before you fire. This is a good place for defense, but we're not as safe as I allowed Mrs. Hammerle to think. Maybe some Indians have heard

the firing we did and they may even have seen us coming into the grove. If they did, they're likely to attack us before sun-up—that's the Indian's favorite time for falling upon his victims. If they do not find us asleep, we can offer them a mighty hot fight right from this deep buffalo wallow, and I reckon unless there's a lot of them, or they take time enough to starve or wear us out, we'll hold our own. Now you can begin to watch. Put the guns and ammunition in the buffalo wallow, and I'll sneak over to that cornfield, and get some water from the slough, too."

In half an hour Ken heard the yowl of a cat in the direction of the cornfield and he answered with a low meow. These were the signals the boys had agreed on. A few minutes later Joe entered camp with a big sack of green corn and a kettle full of water, all of which he put in the buffalo wallow.

"There," he said, "we're ready to stand siege for a day or two if we have to."

Then he rolled himself up in his blanket, crawled under the lean-to, put the emptied corn sack under his head for a pillow and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT, A DAY AND A NIGHT, FETCHING UP IN A RIVER CAVE

KEN scouted slowly around in the little grove until he had trodden down a path in the brush of snowberry and wild spirea. A badger that wobbled through the grass near the willow bushes would have drawn Ken's fire if the excited boy had not had strict orders not to fire without calling Joe. A big hoot owl which had taken an excursion from the river timber made hot and cold shivers run up Ken's back, as he uttered his terrible whoo-who-who from a low poplar under which the tired boy was sitting half asleep.

The weirdness of the scene almost overwhelmed the sensitive boy, whose mind filled the tall grass with hosts of invisible Sioux. The night was so still that it was oppressive; not a leaf stirred on the poplars, but from the distance a coyote again called how-how-how-

how-how, and two, three or four answered from different directions.

It grew colder after midnight. Every leaf and blade not under the protection of some tree or shrub dripped with cold dew, which soaked through the scant clothing of the boy sentinel and seemed to penetrate to his very bones. Under the warm, dry lean-tos the sleepers breathed long and heavily, and as Ken passed them again and again, he was deeply impressed with Joe's forethought, and he shuddered when he thought how easily the whole company might have been tomahawked by one revengeful Sioux.

Finally Ken knew by the position of the "dipper" in the sky that he had done his share of watching, and gently pulled Joe's arm.

Joe was wide awake at once.

"Ken," he said, "you let me sleep too long; it must be two o'clock. Now roll in and get warm and have a good sleep. You deserve it."

The relieved sentinel slipped into a pair of dry overalls and then made himself snug in his friend's warm bed.

Meanwhile Joe took one of the Indian rifles and began to pace around slowly in Ken's trail. On all four sides of the little grove he paused, while his eyes scanned the starlit prairie for suspicious shapes and movements, and his ears strained to catch every sound.

As morning approached, most of the voices of the night became silent; only the crickets on the dry upland continued their shrill tereet, tereet, tereet.

When the sky and stars grew pale in the east, Joe doubled his watchfulness, for he knew that at this time the Sioux is wont to fall upon his victim as the panther springs upon the unsuspecting deer. His eyes, sharpened on many a hunting trip, examined every bush and every growth of tall grass that might possibly conceal the stealthy approach of a Sioux, until the sun rose gorgeously behind a mass of mackerel clouds and Joe felt that the time of danger had passed.

Mrs. Hammerle and little Robert soon arose much refreshed from their warm sleep, but Ken slept until the sun stood high over the prairie and had to be aroused by Joe. The whole party was quite cheerful and began to

plan to continue their journey during the coming night, feeling now quite sure that no Indians had observed them entering the little grove and that even the shots fired had not been heard.

As the day wore on, however, it became apparent that a diet of green, uncooked corn and slough water did not agree with little Robert. He became very sick and, at the same time, demanded more corn to satisfy his hunger. If the boys had dared to discharge their guns, it would have been an easy matter to secure enough fat blackbirds to feed the whole company; to hunt without using guns was another matter. But some food they must find, if the child was not to die.

Joe and Ken talked the matter over and then started out to get some game. The younger boy filled his pockets with stones and crept into the cornfield, where swarms of blackbirds were opening the young ears. When the birds flew he threw a stone into the flock where it was thickest, and by repeating this again and again, he had the great satisfaction of securing five birds. Never was a boy prouder of his game. Joe returned to

camp with two dozen frog legs and a wild duckling, which he had caught by hand. He had seen a whole flock, but all the others had escaped by diving.

Cleaning the game took very little time, and the boys decided to make a smokeless fire of dry sticks and boil game and some green corn in the kettle they had taken from the Indians. A stiff breeze scattered what little smoke there was, and as Joe felt quite sure that there were no Indians in the neighborhood he considered it best to cook a meal which Robert could eat, and which would give the starving child some strength.

“Great Scott!” remarked Ken aside to Joe, as game and corn began to boil; “it’s a bad looking mess, but still I feel as if I could eat it all myself.”

When the meal was ready little Robert drank a tincupful of the soup and was happy to get the duckling, the biggest bird in the pot. Mrs. Hammerle said she could not eat all kinds of wild things and contented herself with the boiled corn. Joe and Ken had no such scruples; frog legs, corn and birds all tasted good to them, even though all were

boiled with nothing but a little salt. Two blackbirds were wrapped up in poplar leaves and kept for little Robert.

“What day was this?” asked Ken, when they had finished supper. “I’ve lost count. So many things have happened that it seems to me we have been traveling a month.”

“Let’s see,” replied Joe. “I think I can figure it out. We started Monday night. It was Tuesday night when the pigs scared us and when we slept in the straw stack. Wednesday night we traveled again and were dumped out of our boat. Thursday we had a fight with the three Indians and found Mrs. Hammerle and little Robert. That was yesterday, so to-day’s Friday. To-morrow we must try to get into New Ulm or Fort Ridgely. You and I might stand this a little longer, but it’s a hard life for a woman and a child.”

“What do you suppose the Indians have been doing all this time?”

“That’s just what I’m anxious to find out. We know that they’ve plundered and murdered all around here, and I’m afraid they’ve taken or are trying to take New Ulm and the

fort. If we only knew what they're doing, we would know what we ought to do."

After dark Ken gathered more green corn, and after examining the guns the little company started toward the river, Joe carrying Robert, who was still awake. The little fellow began to cry, because he wanted to have a gun, too. But when his mother told him to be still or the big Indians would get him again he nestled his blonde curls close to Joe's shoulder and kept quiet. The boys were glad of that.

When all were seated in the boat Joe asked that everybody sit very still and that no one talk above a whisper.

"The boat will carry us all safely," he added, "but we've got to go slow and be very careful with it."

The night grew very dark. About midnight a thunder shower came up, accompanied by a heavy rain, but as there was but little wind and Joe knew this part of the river, this did not hinder them except that they had to go very slow and, so to speak, feel their way.

Little Robert fell asleep in his blanket and knew nothing of thunder and rain.

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They rounded bend after bend with noiseless paddles and nothing occurred to endanger them.

"We're now opposite New Ulm," whispered Joe, "but I think we will run a mile or two farther down, where I know a good hiding place. Ken, let's go a little faster, it is getting daylight and we ought to get off the river."

A moment after he said the last word the boat rounded a sharp curve, and there stood three tepees in plain view.

An expression of horror passed over every face, but there was nothing to do but shoot past them as fast and silently as possible.

"We're safe!" whispered Joe a minute later, "they're still asleep."

They came to a very high, rocky bank, and Joe stopped.

"Here we are," he whispered, almost out of breath. "Now get out quick. Don't go on land, but wade along to those hanging vines. Behind them is a narrow entrance to a small cave which very few people know—even most Indians don't know about it. Get in there and keep quiet."

Ken and Mrs. Hammerle promptly obeyed his orders. Joe lifted a big stone into the boat, tipped the craft enough so as to fill it, and then pushed it into a deep whirlpool, where it sank at once.

"I think we fooled them," he said to his two friends as he crawled into the cave carrying the two paddles. "I bet they'll be puzzled to know what became of this boat, if anyone saw it. I shouldn't be surprised if they think it was a ghost boat, or bad medicine boat, as they call it."

"Anyhow," rejoiced Ken, "we're safe in here. If any Sioux sticks his head into this cave I'll blow it off for him. How in the world did you happen to know this place? You never told me about it."

"I found it by accident, while I was looking for a good place to set a mink trap. White Eagle and I once stayed in here three days during an awful blizzard, when seven Indians that were caught on the prairie froze to death."

"It's a mighty fine place," Ken said, looking around. "Perfectly dry, and just high enough to stretch yourself, and, look, there's

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a little spring in the farthest corner. It's bully, and I wouldn't care if we had to stay here a week. A hundred Indians couldn't drive us out."

"The Indians can't drive us out, but our stomachs will," said Joe. "A few cobs of green corn and two blackbirds isn't much for a company of four."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DASH FOR FORT RIDGELY

FOR the present, the four fugitives were out of danger and they decided to enjoy a much-needed rest. Ken and Mrs. Hammerle made themselves as comfortable as the conditions permitted, while Joe insisted on standing guard.

It was not long before the long, even breathing of his friends told Joe that they had forgotten danger and fatigue. In front of the cave the sun glittered on the river. A kingfisher uttered his noisy rattle and lithe swallows skimmed twittering back and forth. A deer came down the opposite shore for his morning drink, but of humans, either white or Indian, there was neither sign nor sound.

Two hours passed and an almost irresistible drowsiness began to steal over Joe. During the last two days he had slept only a few hours, and had gone through much excitement and hard work. At last he actually fell asleep

standing. His gun dropped rattling to the floor, and he stumbled against the wall of the cave, from which the next moment he sprang up wide awake. He walked to the little spring, and dashed a handful of cold water in his face.

"What a shame," he murmured, "for me to sleep while on guard duty."

It was only about eight in the morning, although to Joe it seemed as if he had been on watch a whole day, when he heard a slight noise on the river toward his left, and a moment later three Indians passed the cave, going up the Cottonwood.

Half an hour later Joe called Ken to plan with him for their further escape and to get a little sleep for himself, for he was again tortured by irresistible attacks of sleepiness, and he feared that he might fall asleep in spite of himself, and expose the whole party to the tomahawks of the Sioux.

Mrs. Hammerle, who was a light sleeper, was awakened by the conversation of the boys, and insisted that both of them lie down for a long sleep, while she stood watch.

"You have saved the life of my boy and

of myself," she said, "and now you look haggard and tired from the hardships you have endured. You are both young boys, and you need rest and sleep before we leave this safe place for more danger and hardship."

But Ken would not hear of sleeping. "If Mrs. Hammerle will watch," said he, "I'll do some scouting. The worst thing about our whole plan is that we don't know a thing about what the Indians are doing, and what is happening. There may be just a few Indians around here and there may be a thousand. New Ulm may still be held by white men, or the Sioux may have killed everybody in the town. It is now Saturday, and since Monday noon we have been hiding by day and traveling by night. I am going to find out what has been happening, so we can tell what to do next."

Joe agreed that this was a good plan, but he cautioned Ken not to expose himself to view in any open places. Before Ken started the three friends breakfasted on the few remaining cobs of corn, and then Joe lay down to sleep, while Mrs. Hammerle sat down to watch near the mouth of the cave.

Ken took his gun and crept up on the bluff over the cave. First he threaded his way through the woods up the Cottonwood to learn whether the three Indian tepees were still in the place where they had passed them at dawn.

The tepees and the Indians were gone, but their camp fire was still smoldering, and a plain trail showed where they had crossed the Cottonwood and proceeded toward New Ulm.

Ken cautiously followed their trail northward to the top of the bluff whence he could survey the country northward, and overlook the marsh and the open plains below, which lie between the town and the high, wooded bluffs of the Cottonwood.

Had Ken not learned a good deal about Indian warfare during the last few days, he would have gone back and reported that there were no Indians anywhere and that the party should at once walk into New Ulm, where all their trials would be over.

There, clear and bold, stood the houses and stores of the frontier town, just as he had seen them a year ago. A cool breeze coming

from the northwest made gently undulating waves in the tall marsh and prairie grasses below him, and a heron stood on the edge of a pool and lazily fished for bullheads and frogs.

"I wish I had some of your game," thought Ken. "You may be thinner than I am, but you can't be any hungrier."

The young scout now turned his eyes to scan the more distant bluffs of the Minnesota river, which appeared stretched out in the distance to the north like a gracefully winding range of hills, and his gaze was soon withdrawn from the picture of peaceful summer on which his eyes had just rested.

Two or three wreaths of smoke were rising several miles above the town. He climbed a tree to get a better view, and soon he saw smoke rising in other places, and still others, until a number of fires were burning on the bluffs opposite the town. At the same time it seemed to him that he saw black lines moving down the ravines, but of this he was not certain on account of the distance.

As he watched, a great column of smoke

arose opposite the town across the Minnesota, and soon a similar column arose two miles farther up the river. Ken was tempted to make his way across the prairie into the town, the more so as no enemy was visible on his side of the town.

But before he could act on this idea he heard a faint noise, as a shout of many distant voices.

The next minute the rattle of hundreds of guns struck his ear, and instantly the meaning of all he had heard and seen flashed upon him.

He fairly dropped out of the tree, and a few minutes later he rushed into the cave out of breath, almost falling over Mrs. Hammerle and nearly setting off her gun into his chest.

“Joe, wake up—wake up!” he shouted. “The Indians and the settlers are having a big fight at New Ulm. I heard the Sioux give their war-whoop and heard a thousand guns go off. Can’t we go and help the New Ulm people fight?”

Joe was awake at once, and Ken excitedly told of everything he had seen. He told

about the burning of the settlers' houses as the Indians came down the Minnesota, about the signal fires, which at first puzzled him, and again asked that he and Joe start out at once and join in the fight.

When Ken stopped to catch his breath Joe expressed an entirely different opinion.

"We can't get into New Ulm alive any more than we can fly to Washington. If you try any such thing, Ken, you'll never see mother and Marjie again. We might as well walk into a Sioux camp and ask them to please hang our scalps on their lodge poles."

But Ken was obstinate. "I'm tired of hiding in the brush like a rabbit, and traveling like a bat at night. I won't hide any longer in all kinds of holes, like a rat, and eat all sorts of green stuff like a strayed sheep. We've licked the Indians twice, why can't we do it again?"

These remarks aroused Joe, and he promised Ken such a beating he would not be able to walk to New Ulm if he started on any such fool's errand. He said they had fought the Indians from ambush—the only way any man in his senses ever did fight Indians,

without getting killed. "And then you ought to remember," he continued, "there are not four or five Indians attacking New Ulm; you would find at least five hundred, maybe a thousand, of them completely surrounding the town, and the idea that we could fight them or get through them on the open prairie is too foolish to think of. But let's stop quarreling and climb the bluff right above to take a look at things. Mrs. Hammerle will be safe with two loaded guns, and we won't be gone long."

Without a word the two boys scaled the bluff and climbed into some tall, bushy box-elders that grew on the highest ridge.

What they saw entirely confirmed Ken's report. The wind being from the northwest they could plainly hear the shooting. Sometimes it seemed as if only two or three persons were firing, then came a report of ten or a dozen and from time to time there was a rattling volley as if forty or fifty men fired at once.

But one change Ken observed, and it filled him with horror. Numerous buildings in the town were on fire, indeed, it looked from a

distance as if the whole town was burning. Both boys watched the scene intently and finally Ken could keep still no longer.

"Maybe I'm crazy, but that looks awful to me," he said. "It looks as if they were sacking the town. Do you think they are?"

"It certainly is the biggest Indian fight that ever happened west of the Mississippi. But if you look sharp you will see that only outside buildings are on fire. The whites must have been prepared for this attack, and I think they are firing the outside buildings themselves so the Indians can't hide in them. I am sure the whites are still fighting, and if they just keep fighting, the Indians will not dare to rush in on them. That is not their way of fighting."

After the boys had watched the battle a while they returned to the cave and told Mrs. Hammerle what they had seen.

Little Robert had eaten one of his black-birds for breakfast and was now playing in the soft white sand, unconscious of danger and war. For Mrs. Hammerle and themselves, the boys had brought their pockets full of wild plums and hazelnuts, and of

these they ate as much as they could without upsetting their stomachs.

All three now agreed that trying to reach New Ulm would be to walk into a death trap with open eyes. Mrs. Hammerle then asked the boys to leave her and Robert in the cave and make their escape unhindered as best they could, but the boys would not hear of this for a minute and declared most emphatically that if they themselves escaped alive she and little Robert would, too. After talking over several plans they decided to make a night dash for Fort Ridgely, about twelve miles up the Minnesota river and on the other side. Should they find Fort Ridgely destroyed, Joe suggested, they could make their way east to the town of Henderson.

This they decided to do and Mrs. Hammerle, whom the boys began to call their German mother, persuaded them to lie down and sleep so they would be fresh for the long march.

The sun had set when their German mother woke them, and they prepared at once for their dash to Fort Ridgely. As soon as it was dark, Joe dived quietly for

the boat, lifted the big stone out of it, and it bobbed to the surface.

Although the whole party felt tortured by hunger, all were in high spirits; even little Robert stopped crying for food when Ken told him they would be with the white soldiers in the morning, who would let him play with a big, big cannon, and give him a whole pie for breakfast, if he would not cry, but that if he did cry the bad Indians would come out of the woods and get them all.

Everything except the four guns and the ammunition was abandoned in the cave and Joe warned Ken and Mrs. Hammerle that this would be the most dangerous part of their whole journey and that they might fall in with the Indians at any moment.

They had paddled about half a mile when their boat glided into the broad Minnesota. They followed this river down stream a little ways in order to get farther away from a much frequented ferry and then landed on the north bank. A number of burning buildings at New Ulm threw a lurid light on the clouds to the west of them, while woods and river near them lay in inky darkness.

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“It looks like a good night for us,” remarked Joe. “A storm is gathering and I think the Sioux will lie still.”

They struck out directly for the upland prairie in order to avoid falling in with Indians that were sure to be camping along the bottom road to Fort Ridgely and in the wooded ravines entering the Minnesota valley from the north.

Hope buoyed up their spirits as they struggled through the brush and tangled weeds of the bottom and then clambered laboriously up the steep, jagged rocks which form the river bluff below the mouth of the Cottonwood. In the darkness, Joe, who was carrying little Robert, stumbled over a crevice in his efforts to save the child from a fall, landed with his bare right hand on a bunch of prickly pear cactus. Many of the terrible barbed spines pierced his flesh to the bone, but he pulled them out by main force and went bravely on, never even betraying to his friends the agony he suffered.

When they reached the prairie traveling became much easier, and they walked at a good pace. While they avoided roads as far

as possible, they had to pass over a dam in order to avoid a long detour around a large slough. They had just started across this dam, when they heard a party of horsemen coming in the opposite direction.

"What are they?" whispered Ken. "Can they be soldiers coming from St. Paul to relieve New Ulm?"

Joe listened a minute. "Good Heaven, no," he said. "They are Indians. The arms and saddles of soldiers would clank and creak."

"Slip off the dam into the water—quick, and keep as quiet as possible! We must hide in the rushes or we are lost."

They waded into the miry slough up to their waists, Mrs. Hammerle holding her boy above the water, while Joe and Ken held up their guns. Swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes covered their hands and faces, and it took all the will power they could muster not to betray themselves to their Sioux enemies, who were filing past in silence only a few yards away.

When they felt assured that all the Indians had passed and that there was not another

troop coming, they came out of the rushes like hunted birds, quickly crossed the dam, and again struck out over the prairie.

Once they stumbled upon a flock of sleeping prairie chickens, and with a tremendous whirr of wings a dozen of the bewildered birds rose almost from under their feet, giving the weary travelers a most sudden alarm.

"If I could catch one of them," Ken broke the silence, "I should eat it raw."

An hour later, the party had to wade a slough and cross a narrow strip of dangerous floating bog. Ken struck a soft place in the floating mat of reeds and grasses and sank to his armpits into the water below. Had he been alone, he would soon have disappeared in the bottomless mire.

The most serious adventure, however, which came near ending their perilous flight, befell them when they came within three or four miles of the fort. Storms and showers had been threatening all night, and the dark clouds had drifted over the plain this way and that way. At last one of these storms, accompanied by a pouring rain and thunder and lightning, broke over the prairie. The

fugitives had sought shelter behind some bushes under a small rocky shelf in a wooded ravine, when to their horror eighty or a hundred Indians entered the same ravine and several warriors squatted within a few yards of them.

“Merciful God,” whispered Joe, as he saw them coming. “Ken, this will be the end of us; get your guns and knife ready. If they capture us, they will torture us to death for killing the two Indians on the Cottonwood.”

When the lightning flashed the boys could distinguish the color in the blankets of the Indians and observe how each squatting Sioux held his gun under his blanket. For half an hour the Indians sat within a few arms' length of the boys, but the storm and rain so occupied their attention, and the darkness was so intense that they left the ravine without discovering the trembling whites under the rock.

“God be thanked for sparing us,” was Mrs. Hammerle's fervent prayer as they continued their journey.

It was daylight when the starved party reached the fort, and irrepressible was their

joy when they found it occupied by about thirty soldiers who had bravely held it against several attacks of hundreds of Sioux.

To Ken's anxious inquiry about his mother and sister, the soldiers could give no answer, having themselves been practically shut off from the outside world for a week. They had been impatiently waiting for reinforcements and were anxious to engage the Indians and drive them out of the country.

The place was running short of rations, for hundreds of settlers had fled to the fort when the massacre began, but the company cook provided the starving party with a real meal and soon after satisfying their raving hunger the boys retired to a quiet corner. A horse blanket served for a mattress and a sack of oats for a pillow, and neither of them arose until the reveille was sounded the next morning.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE BATTLE OF BIRCH COULEE

It was Monday morning, the 25th of August, when Joe and Ken rose from their undisturbed sleep, the first they had enjoyed since they began their perilous flight a week before.

Naturally their first thought on awakening was to inquire about Mrs. Henderson and Marjie among the three hundred fugitives that had reached the fort but neither these nor the soldiers could give them the least news of the missing ones. However, they learned that Joe had not exaggerated the formidable character of the outbreak. Only the week before, on Friday, Chief Little Crow, with a band of twelve hundred Sioux warriors, had made a desperate attack on the fort, and had it not been for the effective work of two howitzers and the twenty-four pounder of Sergeant John Jones, they would

have succeeded in their plan of rushing the fort and killing everybody, and opening the way for an attack on all the towns in the Minnesota valley. The battle had raged from noon until dark. All the wooden buildings around the fort were burned and the whites had fought from a long stone building. This building the Indians had tried to set on fire by shooting hot arrows on the wooden roof. Several boys were stationed under the roof ready to put out any fire, but as frequent rains had soaked the shingles, the Indians could not get the roof to burn.

But although the Indians had been beaten off, the garrison and refugees were practically prisoners in the fort. When the commander, Lieutenant T. J. Sheehan, heard of the fighting at New Ulm, he knew that the Indians had left Fort Ridgely and had gone to attack the town, where they expected an easy victory. But he could send no aid to New Ulm, because the garrison was already too weak to defend the fort and the refugees in case the Indians should return, and had the force been divided, the two sections would have fallen easy victims to the 1,500

frenzied warriors of the crafty Little Crow. So there was nothing for the garrison to do but keep up their vigilance and wait for reinforcements. Every man slept under arms, and was ready for battle the moment the bugler should sound the alarm.

In the meantime, Governor Ramsey at St. Paul had been notified by courier of the formidable outbreak, and he had at once commissioned General Sibley to organize a relief expedition and march to the aid of the fort and the frontier with all possible haste.

General Sibley was well acquainted with the ways and character of the Sioux. He had lived among them and traded with them for many years and spoke their language. He gathered a force of about 1,400 men, consisting of regulars and volunteers, and on Wednesday morning, four days after Joe and Ken had reached the fort, General Sibley's advance guard rode into Fort Ridgely and ended the memorable nine days' siege, during which the brave garrison had held out against a horde of frenzied Indians many times as large, and saved the frontier towns from a deluge of murder and bloodshed.

It was the small garrison of Fort Ridgely that prevented Little Crow from driving all the whites of Minnesota back across the Mississippi.

On the following day General Sibley arrived with his main body of troops and had now in all a force of about 400 men. The general's scout had learned that the people of New Ulm had warded off three attacks of the Indians, but that on Monday they had all left the town and gone to Mankato, thirty miles farther east.

After a few days' rest the general sent out a force of 150 men to bury any dead they might find and to gather all possible information about the strength, movements and whereabouts of the Indians. General Sibley not having any friendly Indian scouts in his command, found it as difficult as Joe and Ken had found it to get any information about the doings and strength of the Indians.

The reconnoitering force was placed in command of Captain Grant, and Joe and Ken and a few other citizens who were anxious to learn the fate of friends and relatives were allowed to join the soldiers.

The command found many evidences of the work of the Indians. On the roads and on the farms whole families had been massacred. The soldiers buried over fifty dead bodies and encamped the first night five miles west of Little Crow's village, which they found entirely deserted. The second day they continued to reconnoiter and buried more dead.

When evening came they were twenty miles from Fort Ridgely and Captain Grant decided to encamp at a place called Birch Coulee. Joe, who had been in high spirits all day as he and Ken galloped over the wide, green prairie, following the trail of the Sioux, became gloomy and silent as soon as camp was pitched.

"What's the trouble with you, Joe?" asked Ken. "Are you played out?"

"Played out," retorted Joe. "I guess not. But I don't like this camping ground."

"What's wrong with it? It's close to wood and water, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's the only good point about it. Look! We camp here, within easy gunshot of that wooded ravine to the south. Now look north. Do you see that ridge? Any

number of Sioux may hide behind it and fire at us. If the Indians find us here, they'll attack us sure. And we're in a trap."

"Why don't you speak to one of the commanders about it?"

"It wouldn't do any good. Some of them did not want us to go along, and they wouldn't listen to any boy's talk. But I want to tell you one thing, if we are attacked here, you lie low and don't you show your head. The wagons and horses which they are arranging around the camp will give us some protection, but it is a mighty bad camping place in a hostile Indian country."

"But, Joe," argued Ken, "we haven't seen any Indians or fresh Indian signs for two days."

"That doesn't prove anything. If you and I had been as careless about our camping places, we'd be lying dead on the prairie now. If any Indian scout sees this camp, a bunch of Sioux will attack us before the sun rises. So look out for yourself, and don't try any show-off stunts or your mother will never see you again!"

After the men had eaten their supper, Cap-

tain Grant established ten picket posts around the camp, and named thirty men to relieve each other in three shifts. The men, as well as Joe and Ken, had been on the move since daylight, and all were glad to get rest and sleep.

“Place your gun handy,” said Joe to Ken. “I miss my guess if we don’t all have to get up in a hurry.”

Ken soon fell into a sound sleep, but Joe was so apprehensive of danger that he lay awake a good part of the night, listening to the restless champing and stamping of the horses.

At last a faint gray dawn spread over the camp, and Joe sat up wide awake. The next half-hour would decide whether his fears had been well grounded.

For fifteen minutes he listened intently. There was no sound except the hoarse croak of a heron flapping his way high over the camp and the fine squeak of a bat circling around after mosquitoes and other small insects.

Joe was getting sleepy now, and lay down again.

Boom! A shot rang out over the prairie.

Before the sound had died away, Joe had hold of his gun.

"The reds are on us!" he yelled. "Grab your gun, Ken!"

He hardly finished the words, before the whole camp was in an uproar. Shouting, and with guns ready, the soldiers rushed out of their tents, while all around the camp, hundreds of Indians sprang out of the grass and yelling their warwhoop, drove the guards into camp and poured a deadly volley into the horses tied to the wagons. For a few moments the scene was one of the utmost noise and confusion.

But in their intention of rushing the camp the Sioux were foiled. On all sides they were received with a sharp fire as soon as they came close enough to be seen.

Joe and Ken had rushed to the least protected east side.

Ken had fired his rifle and was sitting up on his knees, trembling with excitement and ready for a second shot. Without ceremony Joe grabbed him by the neck.

"For God's sake, Ken," he exclaimed,

“get down behind that horse. You’ll have your brains blown out in a minute!”

Just then a bullet whizzed barely over their heads and into the tent behind them, while two or three hit the dead horse in front of them.

Thick and fast the balls came flying, riding every tent.

“Down behind the horses and wagons, boys,” sang out Captain Grant. “Give it to them, boys! We’re lost if they get in!”

For an hour the battle raged. Pale but calm, the lads kept their place in the line, firing at every spot where their keen eyes could spy a movement in the grass in front of them.

Gradually the fire of the Sioux grew less, and came from a greater distance.

“Well,” sighed Joe, “we’ve stopped them from rushing the camp, but it was a horribly close call for all of us.

“I guess I’ll crawl over behind the wagon,” he continued. “I can’t see a thing any more from this place; the brave warriors have all withdrawn to long range.”

In changing his position he exposed himself for just a moment, but long enough for a ball to hit him on the chest and knock him over on his back, but the next moment he was up again, tearing his bloody shirt from his shoulder.

Ken sprang to his assistance.

"Great Lord," he exclaimed. "You've got an awful gash! What can I do to stop the bleeding?"

"Tear up my shirt," Joe told him, "and tie it on the wound. That'll fix me till the doctor can get around to me.

"Look at that big bullet! And the red devil chewed it to make it jagged. It would've killed me, if it hadn't glanced on my collar bone."

A soldier told Joe he had better lie down and keep quiet, but Joe declared he would fight as long as he could see enough to spot an Indian.

During a lull in the fight the boys learned how the battle started.

Just as daylight began to dawn, Sentinel William Hart had noticed something moving on the prairie. After watching it a little

while, he concluded it was a wolf, and sent a ball toward it. It was an Indian, who jumped up and gave the Sioux warwhoop. In an instant hundreds of Indians jumped out of the grass and brush and yelled like maniacs, and the battle was on.

Had it not been for the watchfulness of Sentinel Hart, the Indians would have carried out their plan, to crawl up close and then rush in and massacre the whole command.

But matters were bad enough as it was. Twenty-two soldiers and eighty-four horses lay dead, and sixty men were wounded. Only one horse was left alive. How he had escaped nobody could tell.

It became evident that the command would have to stay in the camp until either relieved, overcome or starved out. Captain Grant, therefore, ordered the soldiers to throw up breastworks. The men went to work at once. Some watched the prairie for Indian heads while others dug the trenches. The soldiers used their bayonets, but Ken had to work with his hunting knife. Joe, whose left arm was almost useless, scanned the prairie

with sharp eyes, and from time to time sent a bullet where he saw the grass moving.

“Joe, how many Sioux have you killed to-day?” asked Ken.

“I can’t tell if I have killed any,” said Joe, “but I have made three of them run. These red devils have tied bundles of grass around their heads and it is almost impossible to see them.”

When noon came the brave defenders were well entrenched. They used wagons, dead horses, and even their dead comrades in building their breastworks.

About this time one soldier after another would say, “Here goes my last cartridge.”

Captain Grant now distributed 3,000 extra cartridges which had been brought on the ammunition wagon, when to his horror he discovered that the ordnance officer had given them sixty-two caliber cartridges for fifty-eight caliber rifles. Then the soldiers set bravely to work at the tedious task of whittling down the balls to the size of their guns, and Captain Grant ordered them to save their ammunition and not to shoot unless they saw a head.

It was now almost quiet in the camp. The Indians had all withdrawn out of range, and sent only an occasional bullet into the camp.

Joe and Ken lay in a trench which they had dug behind a wagon box and a dead horse. Joe's wound was getting very painful and a burning thirst, caused by the heat and by the loss of blood, began to torture him.

"Ken," he said, "I've been very thirsty many times, but I never wanted a drink of cold water as much as now. I would work a whole month for one tincupful. Under those dark green basswoods you can see in the coulee is one of the finest springs in all this country. It seems to me that I can hear the water bubbling over the pebbles now, and here we are all lying in the burning sun and famishing with thirst."

But at four in the afternoon something occurred to relieve the wearing tension of inactivity, thirst and heat. A great commotion was noticed among the Indians and many were seen running off eastward across the coulee. A few minutes later a force of white soldiers came in sight across a ridge about two miles away. As the soldiers in

camp saw their comrades, they gave a ringing hurrah and fired their guns to let their friends know that they were still holding the camp.

However, their hopes for immediate relief were bitterly disappointed. A number of Indians attacked the relief corps, which was under command of Colonel McPhail. The colonel did not know the strength of the Indians, but supposing that he had met all of Little Crow's warriors, from twelve to fifteen hundred well-armed men, considered it too dangerous to march his small force to an attack across the coulee. So he went into camp in a place which he felt sure he could defend, and sent two couriers to Fort Ridgely for reënforcements. Early next morning General Sibley's whole force came in sight and the Indians fled down the coulee and crossed to the south side of the Minnesota river.

The sight which met the rescuers was one of the most awful ever witnessed in Indian warfare.

Nearly half of the command was either dead or wounded. None of the men had had

a wink of sleep or a drop of water for thirty hours. The seriously wounded were groaning with pain and crying for water, while the stench from the dead horses was becoming unbearable.

At last the doctor who had worked amongst the wounded without rest and without tasting a morsel of food, came around to Joe.

"A very bad wound," he remarked, as he took off Ken's crude bandage. "You are a gritty fellow to keep on fighting with a gash like this, but you'll have to keep quiet for a month or more. The flesh is bruised and the skin is so torn that it will be a bad wound to heal."

"Doctor," the impulsive Ken broke in, "Joe is the best Indian fighter in this camp. If it wasn't for him I'd be lying dead somewhere. He kept me from doing foolish things and so we got safely into Fort Ridgely."

"Who are you, boys, anyhow, and what are you doing here?" asked the doctor, his interest having been aroused.

"My name is Ken Henderson, and we are looking for my mother and sister. The In-

dians captured them on our farm on the Cottonwood river, thirty miles west of New Ulm."

"And who is your wounded friend?" asked the doctor. "He doesn't look like your brother."

"No; I'm not," answered Joe. "My name is Joe McDonnell. My father was an Indian trader, and I lived with the Sioux until I was fifteen years old. Then both of my parents died of smallpox, and for the last three years I have lived with Ken's parents."

"And where is Ken's father?" inquired the doctor.

"We don't know," Ken answered with a low voice, and the tears stealing into his eyes. "He went to the war in the South, and we have not heard from him for six weeks."

"Well, you are certainly brave lads," exclaimed the doctor. "I hope you will find your people again. If that shoulder gets very sore, Joe, you just come to me. Some day I want you to tell me how you got away from the Sioux and reached Fort Ridgely. Good-by, boys. Keep up your courage."

CHAPTER X

HEARTBREAKING NEWS

THE doctor's anxiety about Joe's wound proved only too well founded. A dangerous inflammation set in, and for several days the doctor expected to see the deadly gangrene appear on the lacerated shoulder.

There was no ice to be had at this prairie hospital, and cold spring water had to take its place. For two days and two nights, Ken never left the cot of his friend who was now fighting an enemy more implacable than the painted warriors of Little Crow. Every ten minutes, Ken applied cold water to Joe's wound, and when at last he fell exhausted on the floor, Mrs. Hammerle took his place.

Joe was out of his head most of the time, and his fevered brain recalled disconnected experiences of his past life. At one time he was trapping with his Indian friend, White Eagle.

"Listen," he said, as he sat bolt upright on his cot. "Do you hear that owl? It's no owl, it's White Eagle, he can hoot just like an owl. He's lost in the blizzard. Whoo-who-who! Come over here, White Eagle, we will crawl into the cave."

At other times his feverish brain recalled some of his recent adventures. He heard Jim and Tom, Mr. Henderson's horses, clattering down the Mankato road.

"Fine animals," he exclaimed. "The Sioux will never get them, we'll ride them again. Get down in the trench, Ken! That grass-headed Indian is aiming right at your goggles."

And thus his mind wandered. At times he would talk in Sioux, of which Ken could understand only the words "father and mother."

It was not until the fourth day that his breathing became easy and he fell into a restful sleep. The doctor smiled gladly as he looked at the wound and felt Joe's pulse that morning.

"Well," he said to Ken and Mrs. Hammerle, "the boy's pulled through! You have

saved him. Without your help we would have carried him to the little prairie cemetery where so many of the defenders of Birch Coulee have begun their long sleep. Quiet and his fine Scotch constitution will do the rest, but he will not fight any more Indians this fall."

Over a week had now elapsed since the battle of Birch Coulee, which began on the morning of September second, and the soldiers were getting very impatient of the long delay. General Sibley had gathered a force of about 1,400 men who were all eager to take up the trail of Little Crow.

Those were days of heavy responsibility and sleepless nights for the commander. He knew too well the fierce warrior nature of the Sioux to risk a general engagement with a force equal or superior to his own, before he was fully ready and equipped. But besides reasons of military prudence, he had more weighty reasons for not yielding to the impatience of his men and to public clamor for an immediate attack on the Indians.

He had learned through his scouts and through letters from friendly Indians that

Little Crow's band had 270 captive women and children in their camp sixty miles up the Minnesota river, near the mouth of the Yellow Medicine. The hostile Indians had threatened to kill every captive if General Sibley attacked their camp, and the general knew too well that they had it in their power to make good their threat and that they would not scruple to do so.

But the general had still other important information. He knew that the Indians were divided among themselves. The so-called Lower Indians, under Little Crow, who lived around the Indian agency near the mouth of the Redwood river, had committed nearly all the outrages and were in favor of continuing the war. The so-called Upper Indians, who lived around the Indian agency at the mouth of the Yellow Medicine, had taken very little part in the war and their principal chief, Standing Buffalo, was friendly to the whites.

Through the work of such noble, unselfish missionaries as Reverends Riggs and Williams, many of the Sioux had been converted to Christianity, and these Christians and other friendlies had organized a "soldiers'

lodge'' for the purpose of protecting the captives and turning them over to General Sibley.

The Indians held several councils in which Little Crow and other hostiles made speeches for continuing the war and killing the captives, while Little Paul, and other friendlies spoke boldly for peace and surrender of the captives. The friendlies went so far as to announce that they would fight for the captives, if the hostiles should attempt to kill them.

Of all these matters General Sibley was well informed, and knowing that Indians can not be hurried, he had the courage to wait against all outside clamor and pressure. Thus he gave the friendlies time to organize, while the hostiles began to get discouraged and became divided amongst themselves.

At last the time came when he was convinced that the friendlies were strong enough to protect the captives, and on the eighteenth of September the whole command moved toward the Indian camp at the Yellow Medicine.

Joe was now well enough to take his seat in the saddle beside his friend Ken. On the

second day a small troop of mounted Indians began to appear about two miles ahead of the soldiers. Again and again their dark figures loomed large and sharp against the sky, as they crossed the ridges of the rolling prairie.

"What are those fellows doing there ahead of us?" asked Ken.

"They are scouts," Joe answered him. "Little Crow knows all about our movements and our strength, and he and his braves will either fight or run, just as they see fit."

"Well, I hope the general has his scouts out, so the Sioux will not surprise us again, as they did at Birch Coulee," remarked Ken.

"You may be sure he has," replied Joe. "Old Sibley, the Long Trader, as the Indians call him, will not be caught napping, though Little Crow is a mighty sly old fox. John Other Day is Sibley's chief scout, and he is one of the shrewdest, but most faithful and bravest, Indians that ever lived, and the Sioux are all afraid of him."

"Why are they?" asked Ken.

"Well, Other Day, though he is a Christian, is a terrible man in a fight. He has killed several men of his own tribe. His rifle

is always with him, and in his belt he always carries a pistol and a bowie knife.”

That evening the soldiers made their camp at Wood Lake, only a few miles from the camp of the Indians. Next morning some soldiers and two wagons left the camp to forage for potatoes and other vegetables on some deserted farms. They were less than a mile from camp when they almost drove over some ambushed Indians, who fired on them and killed one of the soldiers.

In less than half an hour, a general fight was on. The whole of Little Crow's army seemed to grow out of the ground, and at first drove back the attacking soldiers, but when the field artillery got into position and began to throw shells and canister among the Indians, they fled in wild haste towards their camp. Had Sibley had a sufficient force of cavalry, he could have captured all the hostile Indians right then, but without such a force a successful pursuit was impossible, for the 250 horsemen of General Sibley would have been surrounded and annihilated by the much larger number of Sioux.

The soldiers were very impatient to move

at once on the Indian camp, but the general would not allow it. He said he knew that by an immediate forward movement he could capture most of the women and children of the hostiles, but he also knew that it would cause an attack on the helpless captives. He would, therefore, allow the hostile warriors and their families to get away unmolested, if by doing so he could save the white captives, which was the immediate and most important object of his expedition. With this end in view, he ordered the soldiers to return to camp.

Excitement ran high, when on the third morning the bugler sounded the order to move. Scouts were thrown out in front and on the flanks of the command, but no enemies were encountered. After three hours of marching the soldiers halted within rifle range of the Indian camp, and still saw a few straggling hostiles disappearing westward on the plains.

Joe and Ken were in high spirits, because they naturally expected Mrs. Henderson and Marjie to be in the Indian camp, which now had to surrender to the soldiers.

“Joe, I can hardly wait to see them again,” said Ken. “But do you really think they are there?”

“I feel sure of it,” replied Joe, “they were undoubtedly taken to this main Indian camp, and, if their captors have fled, I don’t think they would burden themselves with any captives, because I know that the Indians are going to have a hard time to provide enough food for themselves during the coming winter. Those fugitive Indians will be starving as soon as they have eaten the provisions they plundered from the whites.”

“What are we going to do if mother and Marjie are not in the camp?” Ken asked.

“Now see here, Ken; wait until we find out!” exclaimed Joe. “I don’t know any more than you what we can do if they are not in this camp.”

General Sibley had sent a demand for the captives, and while the boys were talking, lines of haggard-looking women and children, under escort of friendly Indians, were coming towards the soldiers’ camp. The poor women who had been living for weeks under constant terror of death and violence, danced with joy,

the children screamed, and the soldiers welcomed the captives with ringing hurrahs.

Joe and Ken ran over, and with hungry eyes searched the motley crowd for two beloved faces, but as the last captives filed into camp, the gloom of despair fell over the boys' faces.

Mother and Marjie were not there.

CHAPTER XI

KEN SCOUTS WITH THE SOLDIERS

THE boys at once made inquiries among the captives and they were told that after the battle, the defeated Indians had rushed into the camp and shouted that the soldiers were coming. Then Little Crow and those most deeply implicated in murders and other outrages, had hastily gathered their families and belongings, and when they found that the soldiers were not going to attack their camp at once, they had fled westward. Among those seeking safety in flight, was Cut Ear, the captor of Mrs. Henderson and Marjie. He compelled his captives to mount ponies, and before any of the friendlies could interfere, he galloped out of the camp with them and disappeared behind the hills to the west. As he and his captives were mounted on good horses, he might now easily be a hundred and fifty miles away, and nobody could know what

direction he had taken after he had crossed the brow of the hills. Cut Ear, like Little Crow, had said that he would not be taken alive by any soldiers or white men.

Only one consolation the boys had in their new trouble; they were now certain that their mother and sister were still alive, and it was this knowledge that kept up their spirits in spite of the bad turn things had taken for them.

Ken proposed that they provide themselves with ammunition and a good supply of food and then leave the soldiers and take up the trail of Cut Ear. He argued that they had defied the Indians on their flight down the Cottonwood and as they were now much better armed and could each get a horse, they might risk such a venture.

But Joe, whose temper and training enabled him to gauge accurately the danger of an expedition, called Ken's plan a piece of sheer madness. He said that even in times of peace such a plan would be risky, but that while the war lasted, only a superior force of watchful soldiers could safely pursue the warriors of Little Crow.

"Moreover, Ken," he closed his remonstrance, "inside of two months the winter blizzards will be roaring over these prairies, and every living thing that doesn't have shelter and food must either starve or freeze to death.

"But I tell you what you can do," he continued, "I am well enough now to take care of myself, and you can ride out with the soldiers on their scouting expeditions. Every few days they bring in small, straggling parties of Indians, and it is barely possible that they might run on to Cut Ear. Or you might, in some way, get information about mother and sister.

"I only wish I could see White Eagle. He could find out for us where mother and sister are, and how they are treated. But he is a Sisseton Sioux, his tribe did not join the Medawakantons under Little Crow, and White Eagle is now most likely with his tribe on their fall buffalo hunt in Dakota, where they lay in their store of meat for the winter."

When Ken asked leave of Colonel Marshall to accompany his soldiers on their scouting

and raiding expeditions, the colonel cut him short with the remark that he couldn't encumber his command with any kids.

"But, with your leave, Colonel," Ken replied, boldly, "I wouldn't encumber your men. My friend, Joe McDonnell, and I came down the Cottonwood, and got through the Indians all right."

When the Colonel heard these words he rose quickly from the cot on which he was sitting.

"Let me shake your hand, young man," he said with a deep, friendly voice. "That's different. I've heard of you two fellows. Boys that fought their way through a horde of blood-crazy Sioux and saved a woman and child in addition, can ride with my men whenever they want to. Too bad you killed only two of the red scoundrels. No Indian is any good alive. If I were General Sibley, I'd put a Government bullet in all of these captured reds, instead of feeding them on Government bullocks.

"There is this military court the General has appointed to find out who is guilty and who is not. They are all guilty, and all try

to lie themselves free. If I were the General I would simply say, 'Shoot them as soon as you catch them.'

"Well, good-by, boys. I'm not the General, but you can ride with my men at any and all times."

"The Colonel is a fine fellow and a good fighter," remarked Joe, as they walked away. "But he is away off on the Indian question."

"Why, Ken, I know and everybody who can talk with the Indians knows, that the majority of them were opposed to the outbreak, but the Indians have no real government and there was simply no power to stop the foolish and bad young men when they began to murder. And just think what Other Day and Little Paul and many others did! At the risk of their own lives they saved hundreds of white people!

"There is an Indian side to this story. These Sioux were compelled to give up most of their fine hunting grounds. They claim that the traders cheated them out of a large part of their money. Their annuity of \$75,000 was two months past due and they were starving. Then came reports of our

constant defeats in the South, and at such a critical time the Government left only seventy-five men at Fort Ridgely, the only military post on the Sioux frontier in the whole Minnesota valley. I am not surprised that the Indians broke out. There was only one man who might have tried to stop the massacre, but he hated the whites and wanted to be a big chief. That man is Little Crow. I hope the soldiers will catch him and hang him. But they won't. He knows what he has done and he will take no chances on any military court."

"I can't quite see why so many of the hostiles surrendered," asked Kent.

"Why, Ken, the poor devils were starving. Just think, two thousand Indians camped near the Redwood or Lower agency for two months, waiting for their money. I am surprised they didn't begin the massacre a month sooner. Of course, when the savage Indian goes on the warpath he is an out-and-out savage and kills women and children and peaceful citizens as well as soldiers under arms. That's the way he has been taught and bred. Then the soldiers come and a number of In-

dians are hanged and shot. It's an old story and it will be acted over and over as long as the Indian has any land good enough for the white man to want.

"It makes me mad the way some men talk about Indians. John Other Day, Little Paul, Standing Buffalo and a lot of others are men as noble and as brave as any men who ever lived in a white skin and I would trust my Sisseton friend, White Eagle, as much as I trust you.

"But now you had better get your horse and gun; the soldiers are ready to start. Look out for yourself! If you run on to Little Crow's scouts or Inkpadoota's outlaws, there will be some bullets flying. Good-by, Ken, and take mighty good care of your skin, you are still in the Indian country!"

Ken and the soldiers, as they scoured the country and visited all the isolated homesteads, still found on every hand evidences of the fearful storm of carnage that had swept over the beautiful Minnesota valley. They buried many dead men, women and children. Half-starved and savage dogs met them on many farms, while cattle and hogs, running

at large in the natural groves and in the corn-fields, acted as wild as their ancient ancestors of the forests.

Every house that had not been burned presented a picture of gloomy desolation. All things eatable or of value to an Indian had been carried off. Feather beds and pillows had been ripped open and furniture was thrown about in the yard. Not a living soul was there to be seen in any of the homes.

Now and then, however, the soldiers found a person still wandering around in the woods. A woman with a two-year-old child, all but starved, and partly bereft of her reason, was roaming about aimlessly. At the beginning of the massacre she had fled to the woods with her three children. For several days she lay concealed, often within hearing of bands of Indians. Two of her children died of starvation, but herself and the third lived on raw potatoes and wild plums, and finally on grape leaves, until those were killed by the first autumn frost. When the soldiers found her she had been wandering about for nine weeks, and it was only with the greatest care that the

physicians of the camp nursed her back to health and reason.

A few days after the taking of the Indian camp the white captives were sent East to the settlements, where the fugitives at Fort Ridgely, including Mrs. Hammerle and little Robert, had been sent before General Sibley left the Fort.

Every time Ken returned to camp with the scouts or soldiers, Joe inquired anxiously for news about mother and sister, and asked Ken if he had seen or heard anything of White Eagle, and every time Ken's face told, even before his lips spoke a word, that he had no news.

It was now past the middle of October, and the beautiful, mellow autumn of the prairie was followed by days of cold rains and violent winds that tore the dead, yellow leaves from the trees and swept them into the ravines and hollows. But there were other signs of approaching winter, which drew keen flashes of interest from the stolid faces of the captive Indian warriors as they huddled, chained together two by two in front of their tepees.

The air was alive with water fowl that followed the Minnesota as a highway to the South. Early in the morning and again towards evening thousands of ducks passed over and near the camp; and as the whistle and whirr of their swift, beating wings filled the air, the fettered warrior hunters followed the game with longing eyes.

Besides the almost incredible number of ducks, larger and nobler game of the air was a source of wonder and admiration to all. Great flocks of pelicans glided down the valley on motionless wings like so many snow-white sails. At other times the air was ringing with the honk-honk-honk of wild geese as they passed high overhead on strongly beating wings, and formed lines that measured miles in length. As night fell, there came the shrill cackle of the snow geese; and the bugle call of the great trumpeter swan rang like a battle cry from the clouds.

General Sibley now decided to send Colonel Marshall on a last raid into Dakota Territory, and Joe and Ken readily obtained the Colonel's permission to accompany him. Joe's wound was entirely healed and he said he had

never in his life felt such a longing for something to do.

The Colonel's men were all mounted, and as they rapidly crossed the prairie the troopers never tired of watching the immense flocks of many kinds of waterfowl that had gathered on every lake and slough. But the soldiers were not allowed to shoot any of this tempting game.

"We can't hunt Indians and wild geese on the same trip," the Colonel used to say. "If you ride over the prairie shooting at ducks and geese, you'll catch no Indians, but they may catch you."

Although no Indians were expected east of the Red river, the Colonel always threw out scouts on his front and flanks, and every night he most carefully secured the horses and picketed the camp, which was always made in a place where an attack from ambush was impossible.

"We want no more Birch Coulees," he would say, as he gave his orders.

CHAPTER XII

A DESPERATE PLAN

JOE and Ken, although they had not enlisted, took their regular turns at all camp duties. Ken gave himself entirely over to a soldier's life. He was a great favorite with the scouts, and as he galloped over hills and dales, his face beamed and he seemed to have forgotten his lost parents and sister. Joe, on the contrary, was unusually quiet, and seemed often lost in thought. Even at night, when nothing short of a general alarm for boots and saddles could have aroused Ken, Joe slept lightly and the least unusual noise caused him to sit up and listen.

About fifty miles west of the Red river, near Goose Nest Lake, the troopers surprised and captured an Indian camp consisting of about fifteen lodges. The following night Joe was on picket duty from twelve to two o'clock. It was a warm night, but low hanging clouds

covered the plain with a black earthy darkness, and as Joe paced slowly up and down his beat, his senses were keenly alive to every sound of the night. Towards the east a number of coyotes were howling, inviting their comrades to feast on the scraps of the last camp of the troopers. Near him in the grass chirped a few belated crickets in a faint sort of way, as if they were bidding good-by to summer; while overhead was occasionally heard the whistle of wings of wild fowl.

Joe's attention, however, was fixed on a swale to the west of him, which was densely covered with tall hazel. He could see nothing, but again and again his trained ear detected a faint rustle amongst the dead leaves. Noiselessly he cocked his gun to be ready for any prowling Indian that might be trying to steal up on the camp. He had about concluded that the noise was made by a badger or skunk, foraging among the leaves, when a sound struck him which started his heart to thump violently.

It was the low and long "whoo-who-who" of an owl. There it was again, and as it came the third time, it ended in two short "who-

who's." Now Joe answered it and began to creep toward the thicket. Again and again the sound arose and Joe exactly repeated the call until he lay within twenty-five yards of the thicket. Then he spoke in Sioux:

"If this is White Eagle, call my name."

"Big Boy, Joe McDonnell is my friend," the answer came in Sioux, and Joe walked boldly toward the hazel from which arose a tall, dark form.

"Let me shake your hand, White Eagle! How I have longed to see you. Thank God you have come!"

"I have hunted for you a month," replied the Indian. "But could not find you, and a long time I was afraid you and Ken had been killed."

"Do you know anything about mother and sister?" was Joe's anxious question.

"I know that Cut Ear captured them and took them to Little Crow's village, but I know nothing else."

"Where did you learn that much?"

"I was there when Cut Ear took them, but I had my face painted and your mother did not know me."

“White Eagle, I found your mark and knew you had been there. Tell me all about it.”

With a few more questions from Joe, White Eagle told that he had been visiting some friends at Little Crow's village on the fateful morning of August eighteenth. When he heard Cut Ear and two other Indians say they would go to the settlements on the Cottonwood he decided to accompany them. They murdered two families, and then started for the Henderson farm where Joe and Ken were stacking hay. Cut Ear wanted to kill Joe and Ken, but White Eagle pointed out the guns leaning against the stack, and said he was sure there was another man behind the stack. It was too far to shoot from the woods from where they had been watching the boys, and so they decided not to take any chances on a fight, but go down the river to plunder some more houses. When they came to the Henderson house they were going to kill Mrs. Henderson and Marjie, but when White Eagle suggested that the whites would pay money for the release of captives they made them prisoners. Before they left, White Eagle himself set fire to the straw-shed,

partly to allay the suspicion of the Indians about his not wanting to fight and partly to warn the boys so they could flee and not be murdered by other war parties. As soon as he could do so without further arousing the suspicion of the Indians he left them, saying that he was going to the agency to get a good gun, as the hammer on his had been lost. In reality he had taken the hammer off, so Cut Ear could not compel him to shoot any whites. As soon as he was out of sight of his companions, he struck out northwestward to get away from the country of Little Crow, and joined his own people who had made a hunting camp on the James river, in Dakota.

When Joe asked him why he had not come to General Sibley's camp, he answered that he and all the Sissetons were afraid of the soldiers. They had learned from a letter from General Sibley and from other sources, that the whites were very angry, and that none of the Indians would get any annuity, and that some innocent Indians had been put in irons. They had also heard that the Sissetons were going to be punished for letting Little Crow flee through their territory;

although they did not see him pass through.

“Will you go into camp with me now?” asked Joe.

“No,” said the red man. “I am afraid your chief would make me a prisoner and when General Sibley is told that I was present at the murder of some white people, he may not believe that I only went along to save you and Ken and your mother and sister, and he might put me in prison and in irons like the bad young men of Little Crow. I saw Little Boy Ken many times riding out with the soldiers, but I could never speak to him, because there were always soldiers near him.”

Then Joe told him how he was wounded at Birch Coulee and could not ride out for a long time.

It was now almost time for change of pickets, and before Joe and his friend parted, they promised each other to meet to-morrow when the sun was two hours high, near a big elm on the lake shore, where Joe and Ken would go to hunt or reconnoiter.

“If the soldiers have any food, I would like to taste their meat and bread,” said White

Eagle, before he left Joe. "I followed the soldiers all day and did not dare to shoot any game."

"Indeed, you shall eat some of the white soldiers' bread," said Joe, as he hurried away to the quartermaster's tent. He returned with a handful of hard-tack, a big chunk of bacon and a pocketful of dried apples, delicacies which White Eagle had not tasted for many months.

As the following day was to be a day of rest for the troops, Joe and Ken had no duties to perform and received the Colonel's permission to hunt around the lake. At the big elm, Joe gave the owl call and White Eagle arose from a clump of weeds.

"You are prompt," Joe greeted him.

"Oh, I heard you a long way off," the Indian laughed. "You came like white men, not like Indians. You made much talk and broke many sticks."

"We have much work to do for you, but before we talk, you must eat some more of the soldiers' bread and meat."

When White Eagle had finished his meal, Joe broke the silence.



"YOU ARE MY BROTHERS . . . I WILL FIND YOUR MOTHER AND SISTER."
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"You and I are brothers," he said. "Many times we have hunted beaver and mink. When the great snowstorm caught us we lived together in the cave, and when you lay sick for many days, our mother made your spirit stay in your body. Now we are going to ask you to do much dangerous work for our mother and sister."

After a brief silence White Eagle arose.

"You are my brothers," he replied. "I have heard your words and they are good words and I understand them. I am not afraid of Cut Ear and the other bad men of Inkpadoota. I can walk along the stream like a mink. I will find your mother and sister and come and tell you where they are."

"Will you come to New Ulm or St. Peter and bring us word? You must know that the soldiers and all the whites will leave this country as soon as we get back to the main camp."

For some time White Eagle stood in silence beside the old elm, as if he had not heard Joe's words.

"It is good," he answered then, "that I should go far West and find the white mother

and sister. It is not good that I should come to New Ulm or St. Peter. My heart is a white man's heart, but my face is a Dakota's face. The whites are mad and will shoot me, and you will never hear what I have to say to you."

"Where will you come to us?"

"You are brave, Big Boy. You can fight the bad Dakotas on their prairie. I cannot fight the bad white men in their towns.

"You know the land of the Sissetons and know where the game is found. Let my brother come to the River Sheyenne and I will carry him word from his mother."

"Good," said Joe, after a moment of hard thinking. "I will do as you say. It is dangerous, but it must be done. You will find me on the River Sheyenne in the Sisseton country, somewhere near the mouth of Bald Hill creek. If I am not there, look for me along the river until you find me—or my bones."

Then Joe penciled a short note.

"DEAR MOTHER," it read, "we are both alive and well, but we have no news from Fa-

ther. You can absolutely trust White Eagle, the bearer of this. He saved us all. We are planning to rescue you."

When both boys had signed it, Joe read it in Sioux to his friend, and White Eagle concealed it in his shot pouch.

After the boys had given all their shot and powder to White Eagle, they parted from him with hearty hand shakes.

The conversation had been carried on in the Dakota language and Ken had not caught the drift of it.

"Now tell me," he asked impatiently, "what is the plan of the general and his head scout?"

Joe explained to him and suggested that it might be well if Ken would not join him in this adventure, but would stay in some town during the winter and try to get news from his father, and then return to the Dakota country with the soldiers in the spring.

"No use talking about it," Ken broke in, "if you go to the Indian country, I go too."

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARING TO CROSS THE PLAINS

ON the following morning an air of bustle and expectancy pervaded the camp. The soldiers were making preparations for the homeward march and the two lads were hard at work among a pile of things which they made up into convenient packs.

Their friend, the doctor, had secured for them two fine breech-loading rifles, which the boys hesitated to accept, but the doctor would not be refused.

"You take these guns, boys," he urged, "you're likely to need them. Take them as a present from a friend."

Just then Colonel Marshall passed by and stopped to look at the lads' equipment.

"By the Great Manitou of all the Indians!" he exclaimed with a laugh. "Boys, you look like professional stage robbers. If it wasn't so dangerous, I should like to surprise you

with a squad of troopers to see how scared you would get with that arsenal of yours. Here you have a pair of rifles, two pistols, a pair of bowie knives, a shotgun, an Indian bow and a lot of arrows. Mighty glad I am that I am not Little Crow. I expect you'll bring him, bound and gagged, to St. Paul before the first snow flies."

"That's all right, Colonel," Joe said quietly, "you know we are likely to need all the guns we have." The Colonel, laughing, walked away to attend to some camp duties.

General Sibley had permitted each of the boys to keep an Indian pony, and select from the quartermaster's store whatever they might need.

"It's your pay for your services," was his brief remark.

Each boy had selected for himself two blankets, an extra pair of shoes and necessary clothing. For provisions, they had taken two sides of bacon, two pecks of beans, two pecks of cornmeal and some salt, pepper, tea and sugar, and a bag of hard-tack. A small tent, a kettle, a frying pan, two tin cups, a few spoons and forks completed their outfit.

The things were all gathered in a pile and the boys found it hard work to tie them into suitable packs.

"I don't see," remarked Ken, "why we want to bother with all this grub. Why can't we live on game?"

"If you had seen as many Indians actually starving as I have seen, you would want to know why we don't take twice as much," Joe retorted.

"And now I think of some other things we shall want very much, and which we ought to take, as we have the horses to carry them. We want a spade and an ax and a hatchet for each of us. There will be some lively digging and cutting when we go into winter quarters in Dakota. If we try to roll in on the bare ground all winter, the wolves will soon dig our dead bodies out of the snow."

"I guess you are right about wintering on the plains," observed Ken. "It's likely to get frosty. Perhaps we ought also to take some matches to start our fires with."

"Well, I'll be chased, Ken, if I didn't almost forget the most important thing of all!" exclaimed Joe. "Of course we want a

lot of matches, and we want to keep them in two tin cans, so we can't lose all of them or get all of them wet at once. I can start fire with a rubbing stick, but it's mighty slow business, and sometimes I can't make it work."

Finally everything was packed and the boys were sitting on their blankets and taking a last invoice of their stock. Just then Colonel Marshall returned bringing a brother officer with him.

"Boys," the colonel asked, with a squint at his friend, "don't you want me to furnish you an army wagon and a span of mules?"

"Now, Colonel," replied Joe, laughing, "you've campaigned enough to know that we'll need every article we selected."

"You are right, Joe," the genial colonel answered seriously, "you will need all you have and a whole lot of grit and daring into the bargain, and may the Lord help you to perforate every Indian you get your eyes on!"

Next morning the boys parted from their soldier friends with whom they had become general favorites.

Soon after daybreak the soldiers started the homeward march, leading the gloomy procession of chained captives, while the two lads turned their ponies westward towards the plains.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE TRAIL

THE two friends had not been so happy since their great disappointment at Camp Release. At last they were approaching once more the goal of their brave ambition, and a beautiful day of Indian summer seemed to predict success and helped to cheer them in their adventure.

As their ponies carried a heavy and rather awkward load, the riders made no attempt to travel fast. Crossing ridges and swales at a walk, they found plenty of time to talk over past adventures and make plans for winter and spring. Had there not been such serious business, and so much unknown danger ahead of them, a finer pleasure trip for strong, healthy boys could not have been imagined. The sloughs and sluggish prairie streams were still covered with wild ducks and geese and other waterfowl. The birds, not having been molested, were exceedingly

tame, and on their ponies the boys could approach within such close range that they secured two fine geese and half a dozen fat ducks by shooting them with bow and arrows. Joe was an expert with these Indian weapons, and the boys used them in order to save their ammunition.

The whole prairie seemed to be a vast land of beauty and plenty. Long streamers of white gossamer were suspended from the tall weeds and grasses. Hundreds of lively striped gophers gamboled in the mellow sunshine, and several fat badgers were seen ambling through the yellow grass or sunning themselves in front of their burrows.

"It's a pity," observed Joe, "we can't take half a dozen of these fatsacks along for our winter supply. Their meat is fine and badger fat is better than bacon grease. But we must push on and not load any more stuff on our ponies."

Late in the afternoon the boys made a camp in a little wooded ravine. Ken took care of the ponies. First he watered them at a small creek, then he tethered them out on ropes and pins.

"Look out for your ponies," Colonel Marshall had told them; "you will be up against it if they once get away from you." So they were prepared.

Ken's next duty was to look after the comfort of himself and his friend. He cut armfuls of tall grass and spread it on the ground. Over the grass he spread one blanket, then he smoothed the other blankets over it for cover.

"Now, Joe, look here," he called, "won't this be great to sleep in? We won't need the tent to-night."

"It'll be fine, Ken, but I have to watch my cooking."

Joe indeed had not been idle. In order to save time he had skinned the two fattest mallards, instead of picking them. Then he had put a smooth poplar pole through them and had slowly roasted them over a hot fire. When Ken had finished his work he got out the tin plates, knives and forks, pepper, salt and hard-tack, and it was not long before the boys were eating a supper fit for a king. With a cup of sweet, hot tea they finished their meal, and half an hour later, when only the bones were left of the ducks, the dishes were

washed and all the goods were covered up with canvas.

After they had gathered enough wood for making breakfast they sat and talked, while a bright fire lit up their faces, and the slender, leafless poplars behind the camp cast long shadows on the grass.

"It feels mighty good," remarked Ken, "to sit around a warm fire without fear of those spooky Sioux. Do you really think, Joe, we're entirely safe from them? Since our experience at Birch Coulee I can't get over the feeling that a lot of yelling Indians may spring out of the prairie any time."

"I feel safe here," replied Joe. "They all skipped out of this country when the soldiers got after them, and now they have to hunt for their winter meat; so I think they're probably camped near Devil's Lake, and we're not likely to run into any of them."

When the sun rose over the prairie next morning the boys had their ponies saddled and were ready to continue their journey.

"We can't make much speed," said Joe, "so we must get an early start to make up for our slow pace."

The weather continued fine, with a steady breeze from the northwest, the direction in which the lads were riding. On the evening of the fourth day they camped at the head of Bigstone Lake, having made about one hundred and twenty miles in that time.

The next day being Sunday, the lads stayed in camp to rest. The ponies also needed rest and enjoyed rolling and feeding on a fine meadow, which was still green in spite of the lateness of the season, because buffaloes and Indian ponies had cropped the grass early in the summer and a fresh second growth had sprung up.

The boys were as glad not to be in the saddle as the ponies were not to be under it. After they had mended some packs they strolled to the lake shore, cut some willows for fish poles and caught a mess of black bass for dinner and supper.

"Golly," remarked Joe, as they sauntered back to the camp, "it feels mighty good to be using our own legs once more. We've been straddling the ponies for ten hours a day. Riding horseback is all right when you can go and gallop as you please, but when

you carry a load and have to walk your horse nearly all the time it isn't so much fun."

"When do you think we'll be at Bald Hill creek?" asked Ken.

"Well," said Joe, "it's about a hundred and fifty miles from here, and if we keep sharp at it and don't have an accident or bad weather we ought to be there Saturday night."

"Talk about accidents," replied Ken, "it's a wonder we haven't broken our necks several times. The way these Indian ponies steer clear of badger holes and skunk holes and bogs is a wonder. They must have eyes and noses under their hoofs. It seems they not only see things that are in the way but feel and smell them at the same time."

"The ponies are certainly sure-footed," said Joe. "They've learned to look out for their legs from the first day they were born. What do you suppose happens to an Indian pony that breaks a leg or gets mired?"

"What does happen to him? Doesn't he get well or get out again?"

"No, never. The wolves or the coyotes

tear him to pieces as soon as the herd has moved away. The ponies seem to know this, and it is mighty seldom that one breaks a leg or gets mired."

Some of the bad weather to which Joe had alluded, came next day. The stiff, icy northwesterly wind would have kept most boys in their comfortable camp for another day, but these two lads pushed on in the face of it. As they were now crossing a stretch of almost level prairie, without any shelter, they did not even stop for a short noon rest. About the middle of the afternoon they came to a freshly cut gulch, with tall ragweeds and some plum and choke-cherry bushes on the windward side. As this seemed to be the only shelter they were likely to reach before night, they decided to make camp in the tall weeds and behind the bushes near the gulch. The dead stalks of the giant ragweed and some dead brush furnished them enough fuel for their supper, which they cooked on the bare ground in the gulch in order not to set the prairie on fire. The horses were tethered on the leeward side of the gulch, so as to be at least partly sheltered by the tall weeds and bushes.

This was the first time the boys made a meal entirely on the provisions they had brought from Camp Release. Game had been growing scarce and this last day, while facing the fierce northwester, they had not seen a living thing. The prairie, which a week ago fairly teemed with life, seemed deserted and dead. As both lads were cold and tired, they rolled up in their snug warm tent as soon as it grew dark.

"Joe," asked Ken, "did you ever see it so dark? These low driving clouds just cover the whole world with blackness, and it feels cold enough to snow."

"I'm mighty glad it's so cold," was Joe's reply. "We shall not have any snow as long as it blows so biting cold; but if it warms up and stays cloudy, then look out for a snowfall. And an early snowfall, with a big storm following, would be mighty hard luck for us.

"But let us go to sleep, so we can make a real early start to-morrow. We must try our very best to fix up some sort of permanent shelter before the very cold weather begins, and it's getting so late in the season

now that I am afraid of a blizzard most any time.”

“That’s right, Joe. If a snowstorm met us traveling over this prairie we would have to turn back and keep on going until we found shelter.”

“Yes, and we might be frozen dead by the time we reached shelter. So let’s go to sleep now. Good night, Ken!”

Both boys had been asleep for several hours, when something woke Joe. It took him a few minutes to realize where he was. Then he sat straight up. What was that? He smelled smoke and there was a faint glow on the canvas that sheltered them.

CHAPTER XV

A CLOSE CALL IN A PRAIRIE FIRE

JOE rushed out of the tent.

“Ken,” he yelled, “the prairie’s on fire! Save the guns and bury our ammunition in the ravine. Quick! and throw everything else into the ravine! I’ll run and get the ponies.”

In a twinkling Joe was across the ravine and had pulled the pins of the ponies. It was all he could do to keep the madly roaring and snorting beasts from breaking away on the back trail. With the instinct of a horse-man born, he leaped on his own pony, and now the animal, though trembling with fear and excitement, obeyed him instinctively as he turned its head toward a little side gulch that entered the main ravine. Without resistance, Ken’s pony obeyed the pull of the guide rope; both ponies seemed to know what was wanted of them. A moment later Joe

tied them safely to a big root in the main ravine where Ken was still throwing down blankets, provisions and clothing in a very much mixed pile.

And now the fire was upon them. Blinded and choking with the smoke, Ken himself tumbled down upon the pile of things.

"I don't think I got it all," he gasped. "I couldn't see a thing for the smoke; just had to feel around and grab what I could."

The big dry weeds crackled like a volley of rifles. A sheet of flame shot across the ravine. It caught the weeds and grass on the other side, and the furious wave of fire raced on eastward. In the ravine the heat and smoke became suffocating, and both boys threw themselves down on the ground. There was a loud boom, followed by a regular volley, like rifle fire and "pinging" of bullets.

"What's that?" Joe exclaimed, as he raised his face.

"Must be a can of our powder and some of our ammunition," suggested Ken. "I must have dropped some of it in the grass."

A gust of wind threw a shower of burning

stalks on the boys and their things, and the next moment Ken jumped up with a yell.

“Holy jibbers!” he cried, “my hair’s on fire,” as he made frantic efforts to put out the blaze on his dark, bushy head, in which he succeeded by pulling his coat over his ears.

“Come on, Joe,” he called, “let’s get under a blanket or we’ll be roasted alive.”

But the lads had been in safe hiding only a moment when a cartridge exploded close by. Jumping up, they found their tent and blankets on fire in several spots, and another cartridge exploded right at their feet. They dragged the burning things into the little run of water and stamped out the fire with their boots. Another cartridge exploded under some burning clothing, and the ball whizzed up past Joe’s head.

“Gee!” Joe exclaimed, “we’ll blow ourselves up!” and with that he threw a soaked blanket over the spot where Ken thought he had buried the powder and ammunition.

During all this excitement the ponies had stood quiet as if they knew that they were in the safest place that could be found. When at last the lads had put all combustible things

under the soaked blanket, and there was little fire left to windward, they huddled together in the blankets. The night was still cloudy and pitch dark and they had no idea what time it was. Although they both intended to remain awake that they might promptly meet any possible danger, their eyes soon closed after the excitement of the night and the hard ride of the previous day.

At earliest dawn both were awake and Joe proceeded to arrange the things and take stock of their loss.

One blanket was burned to a black mass. A can of powder and fifty cartridges were gone; Ken had lost a coat; neither boy had a hat.

“Hang the hats!” remarked Joe; “a couple of bandanna handkerchiefs will do just as well.”

“But here is a side of bacon fried to a crisp and a sack of cornmeal all burnt outside. Well, we’ll just start in and have some of this ready cooked grub for breakfast. We can stir some sugar in the dishes; that’ll make the roasted meal taste all right. I’ve eaten things a great deal worse than this.”

"Maybe you could eat a duck cooked Indian fashion with feathers and all, but I'm not used to that kind of grub," answered Ken.

"All right," retorted Joe, "you'll have to get used to it, and start in on singed cornmeal right now or go without your breakfast. You might as well fast now, because then the burnt stuff will taste so much better for supper. Eating this meal now may save us from starvation in January, and I say it's going to be eaten, no matter how it tastes."

For the first time on their trip the boys had a silent breakfast. Joe ate as if burnt mush was his favorite dish, but Ken hardly tasted the food, and looked sullen and gloomy when they were ready to start.

Joe had been watching his friend with concealed amusement, and tried to cheer him up.

"Come on, Ken," he said, "quit your grouch. We've lost a lot of things, but after all we were mighty lucky. If I had slept two minutes longer we might have lost our horses and everything, and then we would have had to give up the trip and hike it back to New Ulm.

“We have saved our guns and most of the ammunition. For the burnt blanket we’ll get some deer skins, and these bandanna handkerchiefs will do for hats until it gets cold enough to use our army caps. Our tent we can fix up, so what’s the use of being blue and grouchy?”

“I don’t mind our losses so much,” replied Ken, “but I don’t see why we should eat this horrible burnt mush. I can’t get it down.”

“Ken, look here now! I’m more afraid of having to fight starvation this winter than Indians. If there was much game left in this country some would have passed our camp ahead of the fire, but I didn’t hear or see a single creature. So many Indians have traveled over this region ahead of us that the game has been killed or driven away. And can’t you see that we’ll be eating our ponies inside of a month if we don’t find game?”

When Ken heard his friend plead so seriously and kindly, he couldn’t be sullen any longer.

“Joe,” he broke the silence, “you are a brick of a far-sighted Scotchman. If you think there’s no game on the prairie, I’ll be

game and eat the burnt stuff five times a day if you say so.”

“Now you are talking sense,” laughed Joe. “I hate the stuff myself, but we’ve got to eat it. I only hope the fire didn’t run down the Sheyenne valley! If it did, we can’t winter at the mouth of Bald Hill creek, nor anywhere in the Sheyenne valley, for there will be no game within fifty miles.”

“Where could we go then?” asked Ken.

“We would have to ride forty miles further west and strike the James river,” answered Joe, “but White Eagle might miss us there.”

For the rest of the day the boys talked little. It was the gloomiest day they had had on their whole trip. Above them the sky was still gray, while all around them the black prairie lay as silent as a grave and as endless as the ocean. At dusk they pitched their ragged tent, and, in the absence of either fuel or water, made a cold supper on burnt cornmeal and a little sugar and bacon. As there was not a blade of grass for the horses, each pony received a piece of hard-tack for his supper.

As night fell, the air and sky grew as black

as the charred prairie below. The brave lads crept into the tattered tent, they spread one blanket on the bare ground, covered themselves with the other blankets, though they were cold and wet, and used some bundles for pillows; and weary and sore as they were in body and heart, their spirits soon fled from the bleak plains to the blessed land of sleep, where youth is not haunted by the troubles of the day.

The next day, on Friday, they rode over another vast stretch of burnt prairie, but towards noon they gave a shout of joy, for they saw the end of the ash-covered land, and late in the evening they pitched their tent under a grove of cottonwoods on the Sheyenne, a little way below the mouth of Bald Hill creek. Their long ride across the prairie had come to an end, and with many thanks to God, the tired boys fell asleep on a soft bed of dry grass.

CHAPTER XVI

BUILDING A WARM CAMP

THE warm sun of a second Indian summer shone through the fire holes of their tent when the boys awoke. Somehow, although fast asleep, the tired lads had known that no longer did they have to be in the saddle at daybreak.

After a quick breakfast of bacon, fried corn mush and tea, they lost no time in getting to work; and work they did as they had never worked before.

A level spot at the foot of a steep slope, only a few rods from the Sheyenne river, was selected as the site of their winter cabin.

Joe, the stronger of the two, dug with might and main to drive an excavation into the hill after the model of a warm barn that he had seen built in a similar location.

“We are going to make it a warm and comfortable place and a pretty safe fort, too,” he said.

The cabin was to be about eight feet wide, by ten feet long. In the rear it was to be about four feet in the ground and as much above the ground, while the entrance in front was to be on the level. When Joe had the excavation ready, he started to drive down a kind of palisade of split and hewn poplars for the inside walls. The frame of the roof was also made of poplar poles and the whole was heavily encased with sod, so that no wind could blow through any crevices.

While Joe was digging as if he expected to find a buried treasure, Ken wielded his ax in a near-by poplar grove, where the trees stood thick and were of the right size.

At the end of a week, the boys were putting the finishing touches on a cabin as cozy and trim as ever a pioneer trapper or settler built in the wilderness. It had even a fairly smooth floor of hewn poplars, for the boys had decided that a dirt floor was too dirty to live on. A small door swung on strong leather hinges, and now Joe, as master mason, was putting the last stones and clay mortar on the fireplace and chimney, which were crude enough, but, as Ken remarked,

would work a great deal better than a simple hole in the roof with the fire below, as the Indians have it in their tepees. The roof, which sloped towards the rear, had been thatched with long grass, and covered over with sod, to make it both rain-proof and frost-proof.

Three small openings, one on each side and one in front, were to serve as port-holes and as windows. On the left side, the boys had built a bunk for their bed, while a small wooden bench and table occupied the right side. In the rear was a small fireplace where short logs could warm the cabin and furnish a convenient place for cooking in cold weather.

"Now," said Joe, as he and Ken finished their supper on Saturday night, "we are ready for winter. The snowstorms may come if they want to. Last week we worked seven days, but to-morrow we'll keep Sunday, and if you want to, Ken, you can sleep until noon."

Ken admitted that logging and carrying stones and mortar had made him feel rather sore. With that, he fastened the door, and

half an hour later the tired lads stretched themselves on their new bed in the cabin.

There were, however, many important little things still to be done before the boys on the Sheyenne were fully equipped for a Dakota winter. While at work on the cabin, they always had their rifles near at hand. They now fixed a pair of wooden hooks against the wall on which the loaded rifles were to be laid as soon as the boys returned from work or hunting. Their ammunition, on which their life and success depended, they were very anxious to hide in some place where an accidental intruder might not find it. Ken hit upon the plan of stowing it away in the legs of their bench. As these legs were simply cut-off blocks of a hollow basswood, the hidden powder and cartridges could only be found if the bench were turned upside down and the plugs pulled out. In order to make sure that they could always get ammunition, even if Indians should burn the cabin or get possession of it in the boys' absence, they hid a hundred cartridges in a hollow basswood half a mile down the creek. The work of concealing their ammunition, of re-

pairing their tent and cutting a small pile of short dry logs for their fireplace, took them two days.

The weather had now turned cold, and frequent snow flurries had filled low places and thickets of weeds and bushes with a dry, powdery snow. Pools and sloughs were frozen over, and even the quiet stretches of the Sheyenne were covered with several inches of ice.

“We were certainly in luck,” remarked Joe, “to strike such mild weather at this time of the year. It would have been a fearful job during a spell of snowstorms and hard frost.”

“That’s right,” replied Ken. “The year we took up our homestead on the Cottonwood we had an awful blizzard about the middle of October. Father got on a horse and rode after the cows before the storm got too bad, and Marjie had a great cry because her cat, Spotted Tom, was not home, and she thought he was lost and would freeze to death in the storm, and she wanted father to ride out again and look for Tom, but father said if Tom didn’t know enough to come home it

would serve him right to get lost. But she found Tom in the cow shed next morning."

"That year we had two feet of snow, and everything was frozen up solid by the first of November."

"Yes, I remember that fall," said Joe. "But I also remember one winter, when White Eagle and I were trapping on the Minnesota, that the river was still entirely open on Christmas day, but on New Year's eve it turned so awfully cold that two days later we took our ponies across the river on the ice. You can't tell what the weather'll do in this part of the country."

This conversation turned the thoughts of both boys to their own ponies.

"What can we do for them?" asked Ken. "It makes me shiver to think that the poor beasts should have to spend the cold nights in the snow and open brush when we are snugly rolled up in our warm cabin. Father always fixed up the sheds and stables for winter before he banked up the house."

"Well, you needn't worry so very much about the ponies," Joe answered. "They

have never been inside a shed, and have pretty warm coats of fur on them. You know an Indian pony just rustles for himself summer and winter and doesn't have his constitution spoiled by being put in a warm barn."

"I know all that," retorted Ken with fervor. "But I don't care what you say, or what the Indians do. It's cruel to treat your horses that way. Let's build them a wind break, at least. I declare, I'll dream of them during every snowstorm, if we don't. It'll only take us a day."

Joe agreed to this plan, and the two boys went to work. The ponies had taken to grazing on a somewhat sheltered slope, about half a mile from the cabin, where the grass had been well cured in the fall. Joe began to cut willows on the southeast side of a thicket below this slope. Ken tied the brush to some standing bushes and small trees, so as to enclose three sides of a rectangle, having only the southeast side open, because bad and cold storms seldom come from that direction. When they had built a good dense brush shelter, they finished the whole of it

with a covering of tall grass, which made their pony corral practically wind-proof.

"I wish we had a roof over it," was Ken's comment. "This thing will shelter them from the wind, but the snow will drift in from above. Let's put a roof on it, Joe. It will not take us long with all this willow brush and tall grass close by."

"Ken, you're a queer chap. You are as thoughtful of these woolly brown ponies as if they were your brothers, while you haven't said a word about your own mother and sister since we made camp here."

"I know, Joe, but I'm thinking of them nearly all the time, and if I did as I felt I'd take my gun and start out for the Sioux camp this minute. We decided we could do nothing for them until spring and until we know where they are. So what's the use of talking about it? I only hope they don't suffer more than we do."

"All right, Ken; we'll put a roof on the shed. I hope the ponies will appreciate it. It may turn out a good plan for us to know just where the ponies are. Unless there's more game some miles away from camp than

I've seen around here, you and I'll dine on pony steak before very long. Our other food is more than half gone."

In the middle of the afternoon the roof was finished, and so well made it was, of slender poles, covered with long grass, that the boys felt sure it would not only keep out the snow, but would shed rain if it should ever happen to rain while they stayed at this camp.

"Only one thing lacking," observed Joe, as he threw in an armful of dry grass for bedding. "We ought to build them a fireplace, so they can warm their toes and noses in the evening."

"Confound your Scotch jokes," was Ken's answer to this, and with that he was on top of his friend, and the two had the first good friendly tussle since they had gone into camp on the Sheyenne.

Afterwards they went to look up the ponies, who came neighing towards them as soon as they recognized their masters. The boys had frequently given them a pinch of salt, of which the ponies were very fond, and in this way, and by good treatment, the ponies had become remarkably tame.

When they reached the shed again Joe had another laugh at the expense of his friend, because the ponies would not go in, and it took a good deal of coaxing to make them enter.

After the ponies had licked up another pinch of salt they were tied up in the corral, and Ken said he was sure it would not take the ponies so long to learn that the shed was a good thing as it had Joe to see it.

That evening the lads felt happy enough to shout, for at last their log and sod cabin was ready for winter, and they could now give their attention to another pressing need, that of hunting to lay in a supply of meat for the winter.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GREAT HUNT FOR MEAT

KEN looked forward to their great hunt with the keenest pleasure. Joe was just as impatient to begin hunting, but he was thinking more of the absolute necessity of getting plenty of game to keep themselves from starving in the winter.

In the morning they untied the ponies and then proceeded on foot down the valley and bluffs of the Sheyenne. They hunted up the wind and approached and circled every copse with the utmost care in search for deer tracks. But the only sign of large game was an old track of a solitary elk, and this they soon lost in a small marsh and could not pick it up again.

At noon Joe sat down with a long face. "No big game in these parts," he said. "We might as well pick up any stray prairie chickens and rabbits that we happen to come across."

When evening came, the hunters had bagged only three chickens and a jack rabbit. They passed the pony shed on their way home and found the ponies had both returned to their shelter.

"I told you," remarked Ken, "that the ponies knew more than you and all the rest of the Indians."

That night the hunters had rabbit stew for supper, and when they had finished, there was very little left of the rabbit.

"Rabbit is mighty good," Ken observed, "but I'll get awfully tired of this everlasting meat without bread and vegetables and with no other seasoning but salt and pepper. If we had only taken a lot of onions we could at least sometimes flavor our meat and broth."

"That's easy," retorted Joe; "take your ax and spade in the morning, and I can show you a place where you can dig enough wild onions to last us all winter. I don't think the ground is frozen very much in that place."

"I'll certainly dig them," was Ken's answer, "if you can show them to me," and

Ken was as good as his word, and, to the great amusement of Joe, dug half a peck of onions before the two friends started on their day's hunt.

The great hunt for meat had now begun in dead earnest. The lads hunted on horseback and on foot, and for about fifteen miles around the camp they left no likely place unexplored. They even left the courses of the Sheyenne and Bald Hill Creek, and made long trips on horseback into the open prairie, in the hope of sighting some stray buffalo, but all their hard work to secure some big game proved in vain. Evidently the numerous hunting parties of the Sioux of the previous summer and the more recent prairie fire had driven all big game out of the region, and no deer, buffalo or antelope were wintering within hunting distance from the lads' camp.

The boys were now almost reduced to an exclusive meat diet and for full rations needed about six prairie chickens or one jack rabbit every day, for the constant vigorous exercise and the keen Dakota air gave them a sharp appetite.

“It’s no use, Ken,” said Joe one evening, when they came home with nothing but two cottontail rabbits and a red squirrel as the result of a whole day’s hunting. “No matter how hard we work, we can’t keep more than a week ahead of starvation, and our ammunition’s going so fast that next spring we’ll not have enough left to fight a squaw. We’ve got to do something else.”

Next morning the boys took a little salt to the ponies and brought home a handful of long horsehair, which they twisted into snares for prairie chickens and rabbits. Then Joe cut some sticks for a dozen traps, while Ken fixed up the fishing tackle and put the bow and arrows in shape.

In the afternoon Joe set the traps for birds and rabbits, while Ken, provided with ax and fishing tackle, made his way to a certain spring hole, which he searched for frogs. Having found a dozen of them, he hastened to a place where the Sheyenne made a bend, and where he expected deep water. Here he took off his coat and chopped six holes in the ice, which was now over a foot thick. In each hole he set a baited hook, and

fixed the lines to the same kind of tip-ups with which he used to fish on the Cottonwood.

Having set all the lines he had, Ken strolled away with his bow and arrow.

“Now,” he thought to himself, “I’ll shoot anything that’s flesh, even down to mice and sparrows.”

And Ken was lucky that afternoon. When he saw Joe coming to the cabin he greeted him with a shout.

“Hurry up, Scotty,” he cried, “come and help me count the game! Look here. I have caught nine pickerel like this fellow,” and he held up the largest, “and here are three squirrels and four woodpeckers, and I haven’t lost any arrows, either. My lines are still set, and when I’ve cleaned out that hole, I’ll move the fishing outfit to another place. We’re not going to starve yet, nor kill one of our ponies.”

The new way proved better than the old. Ken caught some fish almost every day, and Joe caught as much game as they had formerly secured by hunting, and when Christmas and New Year’s had passed, the boys’

larder was stocked with fish and game to last them about two weeks.

The ponies had appreciated their brush shelter so much that they had never left the region, and had returned to the pony cabin, as the boys called it, every cold night. There was now about a foot and a half of snow on the ground, and while there had been a good deal of cold and windy weather there had been no regular blizzards.

The boys decided to make still another determined effort to find some big game. The trip was to be made on horseback, and they started before daybreak, so as to reach farther south than they had ever hunted.

About two in the afternoon, and thirty miles from camp, they were riding along in an easy lope, when Joe reigned up his pony so suddenly that the animal reared up with a snort. Joe himself was shaking with excitement.

“Ken,” he whispered. “There’s a fresh deer track,” pointing to his right. “It’s a big buck. He’s walked toward that thicket half a mile south, and I believe he’s in there now.”

In a few minutes the two hunters had formed their plans. Ken was to hide in a little gully about fifty yards east of a place where the buck would probably pass, if Joe entered the thicket from the north.

“You may have to do the shooting,” said Joe. “I never had such a buck fever in all my life, and if I had to shoot just now I couldn’t hit a barn.”

Ken started at once for his place, making a detour to the right. Joe tied the horses to a box-elder bush and waited until Ken had almost reached his position, then he examined his rifle and took up the trail.

It seemed an hour to him before he reached the thicket. Now he entered it noiselessly, as only an experienced hunter will do. The trail wound this way and that way as the buck had walked along leisurely. Joe was nearing the southern edge of the thicket and was beginning to think that the game had simply passed through, when suddenly the buck sprang up behind a log.

For a moment he looked square at Joe. Joe raised his rifle, his hands trembled, but

he fired. The buck gave a violent leap in the air and raced away into the open, before Joe could fire again.

Then Joe ran to the edge of the timber to see what Ken would do. The buck swerved much farther to the left than the boys had calculated, but Ken fired twice at a distance of a hundred yards. At the second shot the fleeing deer lurched as if hard hit, but the next moment he raced on as if untouched, and disappeared in some low timber half a mile away.

Joe felt keenly disappointed. "We've lost him," he said to himself. "I guess Ken had the buck fever too."

Then he walked over to the trail, and as he saw the great stains of red blood on the snow, he gave the Sioux war-whoop.

"Come on, Ken," he shouted. "Get the horses, we'll have venison for supper; no more woodpecker dinners for us! Hurry up!"

It was easy to follow the trail, but the buck, although evidently hit twice, had gone on to a second piece of timber.

“He was walking slow here,” said Joe, as they followed the trail. “We’ll find him dead in the next grove.”

Joe was right. On the edge of the timber lay the body of the noble animal.

“Thanks to the good Lord for this meat!” exclaimed Joe, as he and Ken dismounted. “At last starvation does not stare at us any more. Ken, when I was a little fellow my father and I found a dead Indian in the woods. I asked father what the man died of. My father looked at the haggard face and said: ‘He starved to death during the cold weather.’ I have been seeing that awful face a hundred times whenever our supply ran low. I won’t think of it again very soon, I guess.”

The sun was now only half an hour high and the lads were over thirty miles from the cabin. Both agreed that it would be best not to start for home before the next morning.

They swung the buck on Ken’s pony, which was used to carrying game, and led both ponies to an elm grove where they intended to make a camp.

Ken naturally looked after the ponies before he thought of supper or of helping Joe with the camp. First he took them to an open place in the river where they could have a good drink. When they had drunk their fill he tied them in a sheltered hollow, right by the camp and cut them a big armful of the best dry grass he could find.

“I know there is mighty little food in this coarse dry stuff,” he said, “but they will chew on it and forget that they are hungry. Poor things, they have hardly had any food all day, and they’ll get precious little to-morrow!”

Ken had really intended to turn the ponies loose, so they might feed during the night; but Joe would not allow it.

“I don’t care how tame they are, or how hungry they are,” he objected, “we can’t run any chances of losing them. To shoulder a hundred pounds of venison and lug it thirty miles through the snow, is no play, and we may yet need the ponies for other purposes, because this deer is not going to last us all winter.”

“Joe, when it comes to horses, you are a

cruel, full-blooded Sioux, I wouldn't be your pony for anything in the world!"

"If my pony could talk, Ken, he would say I was an angel compared with his old Indian master. But never mind this horse talk; sit down and be my guest for supper—hot broiled venison steak, a chunk of hard-tack, and some hot tea and sugar. That'll put you into a less quarrelsome mood."

Ken was not slow in accepting, and he admitted that Joe had fixed up the best supper he ever ate since he left his mother's table on the Cottonwood.

"No flies on you when it comes to cooking," he declared in excess of admiration. "But I stick to my other point. With ponies you're a full-blooded, copper-skinned Indian. When it comes to work, you're white, almost as white as I am. Look what you've done while I tended the ponies! Built a lean-to, made fire and broiled the steak. And I believe you have washed that paunch. What are we going to do with that stuff, anyhow?"

"That stomach we'll clean and eat. It's fine when fixed up right—a great deal better than tripe from a cow."

Supper finished, the boys dragged and carried enough wood to their camp to replenish the fire during the night. Both lads were in high spirits over the success of their hunt, and for an hour they joked and teased each other as only two good chums can do. Their plans and prospects for freeing mother and Marjie were also discussed, but they agreed that it was useless to try and form any definite plan before they heard from White Eagle, and learned where the captives were.

CHAPTER XVIII

OTHER PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMING COLD

AFTER a while they lay down to sleep, with their feet towards the fire. They had not been asleep long when both were awakened by a long-drawn-out howl, which came from the direction of their afternoon trail.

“There are the wolves coming on our trail,” said Joe. “No more sleep for a while. We might as well get our rifles ready.”

“Do you suppose they will attack us?” asked Ken.

“No, not while the fire’s burning. But they will be prowling around here the greater part of the night and will scare our ponies if we don’t watch.”

Soon the boys felt they were entirely surrounded by the fierce, starving brutes. The ponies strained on their ropes and sniffed and snorted with great excitement. After a while the whole pack seemed to be slowly approaching under the wind.

"Great Scott!" said Ken, "I wish we didn't have to save our ammunition. It sounds as if there were two dozen of them."

"We mustn't shoot unless we see their eyes," was Joe's reminder. "We have already wasted so much powder on small game that we can't afford to fire blindly on dark air."

A moment later each lad saw a pair of fierce shining eyes and sent a bullet toward them. There was a scurrying as of many padded feet. Then all was still.

An hour passed, when nothing was seen or heard but a few long howls that seemed to be half a mile away. Presently another pair of eyes peered out of the darkness, and Ken fired. The report of the gun echoed from the distant bluffs, and there was a muffled sound as of something scrambling in the snow.

"You will find him dead in the morning," said Joe. "He's too hard hit to run, but a wounded wolf never yelps like a dog."

The boys now replenished the fire and lay down once more to sleep.

"They're not likely to bother us any more," said Joe. "But if they come too

close again, the ponies will wake us up. We had better try to get a little more sleep; we have a hard trip before us to-morrow."

The wolves did not again molest the lads and at daybreak the hunters were ready to move. They tied the deer securely on Ken's pony and Joe rode ahead to break a trail, while Ken followed the two ponies on foot. When Ken tired of walking, Joe changed places with him and Ken rode Joe's pony. In this manner the small caravan traveled along at a pretty good rate of speed, and reached the home cabin before dark.

The deer was placed in the cabin so it would thaw out and could be skinned in the morning. The ponies were turned loose to rustle for the food of which they were very much in need.

Starvation no longer stared the lads in the face, and, not having that specter to worry about, they were happy and contented. They cut the deer into six pieces which they hung on a pole laid across the crotches of two trees. From time to time they took a chunk of venison into the cabin to thaw so they could cook it.

One great source of discomfort to them had been the darkness of their cabin. They now improved their three small windows by replacing the greased paper by pieces of deer gut, which let in a great deal more light. But after four o'clock in the afternoon, and on cloudy days even earlier, the cabin was as dark as a cellar. To have it really well lighted from the fireplace, required a bright fire, and they had found it impossible always to provide fuel dry enough to burn with a bright flame, and as a result the two friends had sat in darkness or at a low fire many a long evening.

They were now planning to make candles. The deer was very fat, and had furnished them a good lot of tallow, and the threads of an old piece of canvas were to be used as wicks. The next thing was to make molds for casting the candles. For this purpose they dug some clay from under their cabin floor and tamped it around smooth willow sticks, and after pulling out the sticks the molds were ready to receive the wicks. These were pulled through the holes in the board and tied to a thin stick, then the molds were

turned right side up and the upper ends of the wicks were tied to another thin stick and the molds were ready for pouring in the tallow.

They could cast six candles at a time, and the hardened candles had to be cut out of the clay. But the boys were so happy at the prospect of no longer sitting idly in a dark cabin that they did not mind a little trouble and delay. In one day they made three dozen perfect candles.

“Hurrah!” cried Ken, “they are as good as the candles mother used to pour, except that they are a little dirty from the clay, but that doesn’t matter. We’re not likely to have any stylish visitors in this dugout.”

“Mother would never believe what a lot of things we two fellows fixed up here, would she, Joe? She always thought we were mighty awkward, and no good for anything but farming, doing chores and going fishing and hunting.”

“This Indian life is fun if you don’t have to fish and hunt every day to keep from starving. Fishing and hunting are all right for

play, but it's hard luck when you have to do it for a living."

The candles proved a godsend to the boys. They were now able to work indoors several hours every evening, and could devote the daytime to work outside. Being relieved of the pressing necessity for hunting, they put in several days in cutting a supply of wood and piling it up near the cabin. As they had no saw, but only one ax and two hatchets, the work could not progress very fast, and they found it necessary to use only small logs. Another difficulty was the sharpening of their tools. For this purpose they had picked up several suitable stones, and by rubbing their tools on them every day they managed to keep keen edges on their ax, hatchets and knives.

The most difficult work before them was the making of two pairs of snowshoes.

The Sioux and Chippewas use hickory or white ash for the frames of snowshoes, but as no hickory or ash grew on the Shenyenne, the lads were compelled to substitute willow. The willow poles were first heated over a fire

and then bent into a long oval frame, the frame was held in shape and made stronger by two cross pieces, and the web was made of strings of rawhide.

This work occupied the lads over a week. They were eager to try them, but now came one of the worst snowstorms they had ever seen, which prevented the test.

CHAPTER XIX

SNOWBOUND

THEY had planned a great hunt after jack rabbits, when, as they were ready to start, Joe noticed a peculiar haze in the air. On climbing to the top of the bluff above their cabin, he saw a heavy bank of black clouds coming up rapidly from the northwest. Half an hour later the storm broke upon them with a rush and a roar, and in a very short time the air was a mass of rolling and whirling snow. The loose snow on the ground was picked up by the wind and whirled along with that from the clouds. By noon the storm had increased so that it was almost like night in the cabin, while outside one could not see five yards ahead.

Ken started to get some venison from the meat tree, but Joe called him back and said:

“Here, tie this string to the cabin and to the tree. Don’t you remember Jim Larsen

who got lost between his barn and house in the blizzard two years ago, and froze to death? If you should miss the cabin, you might freeze within fifty yards of it and I couldn't do a thing to help you."

Ken started out with the string, and when he came back he was almost breathless.

"You can't keep your eyes open," he gasped. "The snow stings like a thousand needles and you couldn't hear a shout five yards."

The storm lasted three days, and at the end of that time, it had turned so bitterly cold that the frozen venison became as brittle as ice. But the cabin was comfortably warm—it was so banked and covered with snow that the boys had to shovel themselves out.

Snowbound, they rather enjoyed their enforced captivity, for it was the first long rest they had had for more than a month.

"It feels almost like vacation," remarked Ken. "I wish it would snow and blow some more."

Ken's wish was abundantly fulfilled. For more than a week the weather took turns at snowing and blowing. The boys felt that

they ought to go and look after the ponies, but some days were so fiercely cold that they could do little else but provide themselves with wood which they were now compelled to carry some distance, because the most easily handled trees near their cabin had been consumed. Other days were so stormy that the two campers did not leave the cabin for fear of getting bewildered and lost in the storm.

This staying at home after so much violent exercise was really much enjoyed. One day when the boys were cooking a venison stew seasoned with wild onions, Joe surprised Ken by asking:

“Can you figure out what date this is?”

Ken thought a while and then gave it up, saying he had no idea whether it was the third week of January or the first week of February.

“I thought you had lost your reckoning,” said Joe. “If it wasn’t for me you would have to wait for the Indian calendar.”

“What’s that?” asked Ken.

“Crows,” answered Joe. “Very often the Indians lost their reckoning during winter, and the only way they knew when spring was

actually coming was by the return of the crows."

Then he explained to Ken that he had made a charcoal mark on one of their bunk posts for every Sunday they had been in camp, and from these marks he soon figured out that it was now the first of February.

"And that means," he added, "that we have to figure on six or eight more weeks of winter. Our meat is going fast, and just as soon as the weather lets up a little we've got to start out again to find more meat."

That afternoon Joe made a calendar. He whittled out four smooth poplar chips, and, with a short stub pencil, he marked them with the number of days for February, March, April and May, respectively.

"Now," he said, "if we cross one number for every day, we'll know what time of the year it is, and what kind of weather to look for."

"When do you look for spring in this country?" asked Ken.

"Well," said Joe, "the ice ought to be going out of the streams about the first of April, and as soon as there is any open water the

ducks and geese will return and the badgers and muskrats will come out of their houses and burrows, and then we won't have to worry any more about food, because the whole prairie and every slough and pond will be alive with good meat. But that time is still two months off."

CHAPTER XX

OUT AFTER MEAT; CAUGHT IN A STORM

AFTER the weather had moderated the boys again planned to secure some more provisions, because their venison was going fast. They tried fishing in the Sheyenne, but could not catch a thing. Joe remembered a small lake about fifteen miles northwest of their camp. This lake was fed from a small spring and Joe, some years ago, had found bullheads very plentiful where the run entered the lake.

“All you had to do,” he said, “was just to stand there and scoop them out with your hands or your snowshoes.”

At home both of the lads had liked catching fish much better than eating them, but now both agreed that fried bullhead and bullhead chowder, would make a very agreeable change in their bill of fare which had grown to be venison for breakfast and venison for

supper. Since the boys had been snowed in they had reduced the number of their daily meals to these two.

It was decided to make the trip on their new snowshoes. They took along their blankets and rifles, three days' provisions, and a hatchet. They also took along two gunny sacks and a few candles. In the sacks they intended to carry their fish home, and Joe thought the candles might come handy in camp, as there was but little wood around the lake.

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived, and they had all they could do to fix up camp before dark. In a sheltered spot under some wild plum trees they built a brush shed enclosed on three sides, and by the time it grew dark they had cleared away the snow from their sleeping place, covered it with fine brush, and on this fine brush spread their blankets. After eating their supper of venison and hot tea, they were ready to turn in. To keep a fire burning in front of their camp was out of the question, because dry sticks of choke-cherry and sumach were the largest fuel to be found. So

they banked the snow around their brush camp and rolled in. Although the night grew very cold, they were soon sound asleep. The brush and one double blanket under them kept out the cold from the ground, and the two double blankets over them kept them warm from above, and no wind could come through the well-built walls of brush and snow.

The eastern sky was just changing from deep blue to pale gray when they woke up, and they lost no time to get at their day's work. Within half an hour breakfast, which was an exact duplicate of last night's supper, was over, and when the sun had risen a few feet above the horizon the boys were looking for bullheads more earnestly than they had ever looked for that kind of fish before.

They explored the inlet and the outlet of the small lake, but saw no bullheads or fish of any size. They cut half a dozen holes through the ice in different parts of the lake with no better results. The lake was so low that it was almost frozen dry.

"I tell you what's the matter," said Joe. "These prairie lakes change so much in level

every few years that you can't tell whether you'll find any fish in them or not. After the water has been high for a few years a lake just swarms with fish. Then comes a dry spell, and the lake almost dries up in summer and freezes to the bottom in winter, and nothing is left alive in them except a lot of crawly looking bugs and small minnows. That's what we've struck."

"Let's catch a pailful of these minnows; we may need them, and they look clean enough. If they only weren't so miserably small. Why, they're only half as big as those little pickled herrings which some fellows eat with head, tail and all."

But even the minnows were not easy to get. When, at last, they had their pail almost full, Joe stopped to take a look at the weather.

"Ken," he said, "I think we had better quit this minnow catching. Look at those clouds in the northwest. Inside of an hour we'll have a snowstorm that will make things lively on this prairie. We'd better fix our lean-to for the storm."

There was no time to lose. The boys cut a mass of brush and made a regular brush

tepee out of their lean-to. They covered the brush with heavy layers of rushes cut on the lake, and tied the whole together firmly with withes of willow, and around the outside they tied half a dozen of the largest poles they could find.

After supper they put everything carefully into the tepee, including several armfuls of dry sticks. When it grew dark, the wind was already blowing lively, and rolled the snow before it in great billows.

The next morning it seemed to Ken that daylight would never come. At last he felt he could not sleep any longer. He gave Joe a shake, saying:

“Joe, wake up! I think we are plumb snowed in.”

When the boys looked around they found Ken was right. They poked a hole through the tepee wall and found there was a dim daylight outside, but inside the tepee it was almost as dark as night.

Outside the storm roared—the dull, deep bass of the prairie blizzard, a sound one never forgets after he has heard it once. Air and snow were one moving mass, swirling, rolling

and rushing from the northwest to the southeast. Even the bushes growing only ten yards from the tepee were buried.

“Good gracious, Joe!” exclaimed Ken. “Look at that—the snow’s piled half way up our tepee.”

“We ought to be mighty glad of it,” said Joe. “If that snow hadn’t walled us in we wouldn’t have slept so comfortably as we did until a way into the forenoon. We would have frozen half to death.”

“But what are we going to do now? How are we going to get back to our cabin in this storm?”

CHAPTER XXI

DENNED UP LIKE GOPHERS IN A HOLE

“Do now?” said Joe. “If you ever wanted to take a rest, Ken, you can take it now. As long as this storm lasts we’ll not do a blessed thing. We’ll stay right here in this brush pile until that blizzard has blown itself dead. Don’t you know the rule about taking care of yourself in a blizzard?”

“No, I don’t,” said Ken. “I’ve always been at home when there was a blizzard on the Cottonwood.”

“Well, there is just one rule about it: Get into the best shelter you can find or make and stay there.”

“What on earth are we going to do? Just sit here in this hole and let it blow?”

“That’s about it. We’ll just sleep as much as we can, and rest the rest of the time. You can figure on loafing three or four days.”

“But we haven’t enough to eat for three or four days.”

“No, we haven’t, but we’ll make it reach. There’ll be only one meal a day. That’s plenty when a fellow isn’t doing anything. We have a little venison left and a whole pailful of fresh fish.”

“Hang your minnows! None of them for me.”

“Oh, you’ll eat them all right. They’re not half bad, and you may be thankful they are not young bullheads with stickers on them.”

When Joe thought it was about noon the boys made dinner. With the forethought of an experienced outdoor man, Joe had brought a kettle full of water along the night before. Experienced men do not use melted snow if they can help it. One who has never tried it is always very much surprised at the length of time and the amount of fuel it takes to melt enough snow for a quart of water. There wasn’t much to the dinner, just plain hot tea and venison, but the little fire of dry sticks made the brush camp very homelike.

"Say," exclaimed Ken, as he watched the smoke curl out of a little opening in the center, "this is bully. Hear that old storm roar! Let it roar all it wants to; we're all right here."

But before very long they had to let the fire go out, because they would need the wood for cooking. The opening also had to be plugged up to keep the snow and the cold from coming in, for the temperature was rapidly falling.

After sitting and talking in the dark for quite a while, Ken suggested that they light a candle.

"Not on your life," objected Joe. "Those candles aren't going to be burnt, we're going to eat them."

"Joe, you're getting crazy! You can eat yours; I'll burn mine."

"No you won't! Those candles are just plain deer tallow, and we'll fry some minnows with them to-morrow for dinner. The rest of the venison we'll keep for the trip to camp."

"Joe, you are the darndest Indian I ever saw. I expect to-morrow you'll want to make me eat those miserable minnows raw. We

might as well be whole Indians as half Indians."

"Oh, dry up, Ken," replied Joe a little vexed. "You don't know any more about Indians than I know about Greek. Don't you even know that the Indians never eat raw meat any more than a white man does? There isn't a Sioux or Chippewa in this whole country who would touch a piece of raw flesh or fish unless he was actually starving and had no possible way of building a fire to cook it."

"Well, I'll eat those pesky minnow critters if I've got to. If you'll fry them with a candle, down they'll go. You are certainly a pretty good Indian when it comes to taking care of yourself."

The boys followed Joe's plan. Ken reconciled himself to the dinners on minnows fried in candle fat, and said they were much better than he had thought, and if he only could have a little salt and pepper with them he would really like the mess.

Still the time passed very, very slowly. The boys talked over everything they had done, and all their plans for the future. Often

they talked of their mother and Marjie, and wondered if they were alive, where they might be, and whether they fared as well as Joe and Ken had. And where was Father? Perhaps he was already buried in the South. Ken was inclined to fear that his mother and sister were dead, or if alive, that they would never find them. Joe, however, tried to calm Ken's fears. He explained that the band of Inkpadoota, although a bad lot, held the two women for a ransom as they had done with Mrs. Sharp, whom they had captured in a massacre in Iowa a few years ago, and for that reason they would not be likely to kill or abuse them. As to finding them, that wasn't as hopeless as it looked. The Indians were almost certainly encamped now either on Devil's Lake or somewhere on the Missouri river, because these were the only places where they could find shelter and wood and some game. And if the game failed them, they were sure of catching fish, especially in Devil's Lake.

“I think White Eagle can find out whether any Indians have kept a white woman and a white girl as captives. You see the Indians

talk and gossip about these things, and carry such news from camp to camp over hundreds of miles.

“If we don’t hear from White Eagle by the first of May, then we either have to start independently on a scouting trip or we’ll have to join some white soldiers. I feel pretty sure the government will send another expedition against the Indians next spring. But I pin my faith to White Eagle. If we once know exactly where mother and Marjie are, we’ll plan to get them away somehow, or know the reason why.”

“I sometimes think,” remarked Ken, “we two fellows are attempting an impossible thing. What chances have we against a whole lot of Indians, anyway?”

“It’s mighty risky, all right,” Joe admitted, “but we know the country and the ways of the Indians pretty well. White Eagle is our friend, and one of the best hunters and scouts I ever knew. Why, Ken, that young Indian carries in his head a map of the whole country from the Minnesota river to the Missouri. He never forgets a country he has once been over.”

“Do you think, Joe, he will find our camp on the Sheyenne?”

“Find our camp? He’ll walk to our camp as easily as you find our water kettle in this tepee. If he isn’t dead or sick, he’ll come.”

“But what chance would we stand in a real fight with a bunch of Indians?”

“Chance? We might get into some desperate fixes, but remember we are much better armed than they are. We have two breech-loading rifles, a good, double-barreled shotgun, and two pistols. Our rifles carry much farther than any guns the Indians have, and with our breech-loaders we can drive home a dozen bullets to every one fired by the Sioux. I know this whole scheme of ours is a dangerous business, but we can put up a hard fight, if necessary, before any Indian gets our scalps, if we are watchful and don’t walk into some trap.

“Our greatest trouble is, that there are only two of us. If one of us should get badly wounded, we would be in a desperate fix. So remember, be very, very careful. Never go anywhere without your rifle and take no chances when you don’t absolutely have to.”

In this way the boys talked things over, not once, but many times. Ken chafed a good deal at being denned up like a gopher in his hole, but Joe, who was used to the Indian way of living—to go through violent exertions for several days and then to do nothing for so many days—did not mind it very much.

Once a day Ken ran down to the little creek for water. While the storm was at its worst he stuck a piece of brush in the snow every few yards, so he would not lose his way. On the third day the air began to clear, but it grew so fearfully cold that the boys found it hard to keep warm except when huddled together under their blankets. To gather more wood was almost impossible because everything was buried under drifts of snow from five to ten feet high.

On the morning of the fourth day, with a cutting cold wind, but a clear sky, the lads started for the home camp. A very small piece of venison and a kettleful of ice were all the provisions they had left.

Before they started, Joe said to Ken:

“Now watch your hands and feet, Ken. This is going to be the coldest trip we ever

took. It must be 40 below zero. An old Indian once gave me some good advice when I started to visit my traps on a very cold day. He said: 'Look out you don't freeze your feet or your hands. If you freeze your feet you can't walk; if you freeze your hands you can't build a fire.' I've always remembered that.

"On a very cold day, it's a bad plan to carry anything in your hands if you don't have to. It seems to keep the blood out of your fingers and make them cold. Fix your boots or moccasins so no snow can get into them, and take care not to get your feet wet if you travel over lakes or rivers. Lace your boots just right. If they're laced too loose, your feet are apt to get chafed; if they are laced too tight the blood cannot circulate and your feet will get cold and they may freeze."

With everything tied in their packs the lads marched along straight for their camp, guiding themselves by the sun and by compass. Traveling on snow shoes was hard work for Ken, who was not used to it. Not a living thing they saw, until about noon they scared up a big jack rabbit in a little coulee. Both



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took after him, and when, after an hour's stalking and tracking, Joe killed him with a long-range rifle shot, both lads shouted and jumped for joy.

It was dark when they reached their cabin, and, after digging through a snowdrift for half an hour, they stumbled into their cabin, dead tired, but mighty glad to get back.

A hot rabbit stew, with a few wild onions and a pinch of salt and pepper for seasoning, and chunks of green poplar crackling and sizzling in the fireplace, made the cabin on the Sheyenne seem a mighty cozy place.

There was very little talk after supper.

"I'm glad," Ken remarked, as he adjusted his blankets, "we are out of that gopher den and don't have minnows and candles for grub any more."

"I too," replied Joe, drowsily. Then the two tired lads dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER XXII

FIGHTING STARVATION

NEXT morning both boys went down to the stream to get wood, water and meat. As they approached the place where they had hung up their deer, Joe suddenly pointed speechless to some fallen trees before them.

“Look at that!” he gasped.

With a rush the boys were among the fallen branches. At first they could not realize what had happened, although the record was plain enough. The snow was trampled down by a band of wolves, and of their deer nothing was left but a few large bones, the gnawed head, the feet and a few scraps of skin. The storm had thrown down an old cottonwood which in falling had torn down their meat tree, and a famished, roving band of wolves had devoured the meat which stood between the boys and starvation.

Without a word the two lads gathered up

every scrap of bone and skin and carried them to the cabin; both of them knew too well what this misfortune meant.

In silence they took their rifles and started toward the pony shed.

"Did you ever eat horse meat?" asked Ken as they came in sight of the shed.

"No," replied Joe, "I never did. And I don't want to, but it will be a case of have to or starve."

There was no trace of ponies around the shed. For three hours the lads tramped all over the country where the horses used to graze, but there was neither sign nor track of them.

"They're gone," said Joe at last. "If the wolves got their wind, they drove them off and devoured them. It may be they wandered away in search of better food and shelter. They may be fifty or a hundred miles away, and it's no use to look for them.

"This is the tenth of March. If we can stick it out till the tenth of April, we are all right. By that time ducks and geese ought to be coming back. If we can't last that long, we're done for."

“We’ll stick it out, Joe,” said the determined Ken.

“That’s my idea,” replied Joe curtly. “Come, let’s go back home and cook a piece of rabbit and venison. I’m awfully hungry. One meal a day, and a mighty slim one at that will be the rule of this camp until the ducks return.”

After supper the lads cut the two-pound chunk of venison and the left-overs of the jack rabbit into thirty pieces. The remaining candles they also cut into thirty pieces.

“There,” Joe remarked, “a piece of venison and of rabbit and a stump of candle for each day! If we get any more it’ll be by our wits. I never saw such a God-forsaken country as this is in all my life for game. Three years ago some Indians killed several buffalo and two elk within three miles of this camp, and deer were plenty, and now you can’t even find a jack rabbit or a cottontail.

“There are some muskrat houses on the sloughs, but muskrats are the one game we can’t get, because we didn’t have sense enough to take along a rat spear and trap. I have been racking my brain for some way

of catching them, but I can't think of any. They will gnaw off any kind of snare, and you can't make a deadfall for them. And I never saw any open water in any of the sloughs around here, where one might get a chance to shoot some."

"I tell you what," rejoined Ken, who had been dreaming a bit, "if we just could have some bread, potatoes and some other things with it, that meat ration of ours would be plenty."

"Oh, Ken, freeze up with your 'ifs.' I am hungry enough without your fool talk of bread and potatoes. I feel kind of cross to-night and as tired as a dog. Oh, Ken, I didn't mean to be rude to you, but don't talk of bread and potatoes any more. I've been thinking about them myself and it makes me kind of mad to think I am such a fool."

"To tell the truth," replied Ken, "I feel as tired and cross as you do. Let's go to bed. Maybe we can sleep it off."

In the morning the boys lost no time getting to work on the task of securing some kind of food that would help them to live until the close of winter. As all the usual and

regular sources of food had failed them, they were ready for any emergency food which might help them to ward off starvation.

Not far from their cabin grew several clumps of hazel brush. Of this they cut several armfuls and carried it inside their cabin. A novice in woodcraft would say they couldn't eat hazel brush, and of course they couldn't. But the hazel hangs out the pollen catkins of spring in the preceding autumn and keeps them on the bushes all winter, ready to burst and shed the golden dust before the frost is out of the ground. The boys had once or twice found these catkins in the stomach of grouse, so they concluded if they were good eating for grouse, they wouldn't be so bad for boys. In the cabin they picked about a quart of them, crushed them on the flat of their ax and then boiled them until the mass looked somewhat like porridge. When they thought their catkin porridge would not get any softer they added one of the thirty small pieces of venison and rabbit, seasoned the mess with a little salt and pepper, a few wild onions and a stump of candle, and in the

course of another hour they had their first starvation dinner.

“Well, that mess tastes better than it looks,” declared Joe. “But I think we’d better not eat too much of these bird and animal foods. They might upset our stomachs, and to get sick in this wild country would be almost as bad as to starve.”

After the first three or four days of this kind of life had passed, the lads were surprised that they stood it so well, although it was hard to forget a feeling of the emptiness and hunger. They did everything they could to adjust their manner of life to the short fare. They slept and remained rolled up in their blankets as long as they could possibly stand it. No work that could be done inside their warm cabin was done outside. Chopping wood, getting hazel brush or other material was the only work and exercise they did outside. They figured that with little exercise and little exposure to the cold they could get along on less food.

Everything seemed to work out pretty well, except the long sleeps. In this matter nature was perverse. Neither Joe nor Ken had ever

wanted so little sleep. Every morning both were awake before the first daylight shone through the air chinks in their cabin.

"If I could only sleep now as I used to in haying and plowing time on the Cottonwood," Ken wished many a time.

"Or as I did when out trapping," added Joe.

Still, in spite of all, the boys got along remarkably well and managed to keep up their spirits, which is even more important to scouts, explorers and soldiers than to find something to eat. They even joked about their bird grub.

"Oh, we're a long way from being dead," Joe would sing out with a laugh. "If the worst comes to the worst, we can boil some grease out of our boot leather and we have some patches of deer skin and a whole rabbit skin. These skins contain some glue, anyhow."

"I have read of Arctic explorers and sailors who kept alive on just that kind of stuff," said Ken.

The boys soon vied with each other in finding things that would help them over the

hard month. Joe knew that the red, tart buffalo berries were good to eat, and Ken said he knew of some Germans in Illinois who made a fine soup of the red hips of the roses. When buffalo berries, hazel and rose hips had been pretty well cleaned up within a mile of the cabin, they even collected armfuls of basswood twigs, from which they picked off the large mucilaginous buds.

Gathering the twigs and picking off the fruit or buds had the good effect of keeping their minds and hands busy for a considerable part of the day. Scouting about for some kind of "funny grub," as Ken called it, cooking and eating, cutting and carrying wood, kept them from thinking too much about being hungry. Much of the work was very tedious. The buds had to be picked one by one, each of the little wild rose hips had to be opened and the hairy seeds removed before the red shells were fit to be cooked or eaten raw.

The lads found themselves gradually falling into silence, neither of them saying a word for hours at a time. Everything they hoped to do, all their fears and plans, had

been talked over so many times that there seemed nothing more to say. But at times some new humorous aspect of their life would strike them.

“You are certainly all right on gathering chicken feed for men,” Ken would remark to Joe. “That’s all this stuff is we are eating here.”

“Yes,” retorted Joe, “but I have not reached the limit of my resources yet. Before we starve plumb to death we shall go for the fat grubs and ants in the rotten logs. If a man has an ax in this country he ought not to starve to death, though he may have to do some fasting and swallow some queer grub.”

“Brr,” exclaimed Ken in disgust, “no bugs for me!”

“Oh, you would eat them, all right, if you just grew thin and hungry enough.”

“Do you know of any men who actually starved to death besides the ones you told me of?”

“Yes, I know of two Chippewas who starved to death in the northern woods of Minnesota. They were old men who stayed

in a poor game country until they were too weak to travel. The Indians found them dead in the spring and said they had starved, but I think they just gave up the fight too soon, and had no place to keep really warm. If they had had as warm a cabin as we have, and had kept up their spirits, they would have come out all right. But an Indian tepee is never really warm in cold weather, and almost every spring the Indian villages suffer from starvation, which carries off some of the children and old people.”

One day Ken declared he had a new scheme to dig some roots in a marsh. When they had reached a cattail swamp about two miles from camp, Ken began to chop out chunks of dirt with pieces of cattail roots in them while Joe, who, greatly to his surprise, discovered a small patch of open water, went to look for signs of muskrats or mink.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LONG WINTER BROKEN

To his great joy there were tracks of both rats and mink. Joe sat down to wait, and in this kind of hunting he was a master. He waited a long time, and grew so sleepy that he had to pinch himself hard to keep awake. About noon the sun came out. "Now," Joe thought, "the game ought to show up." Ken, becoming uneasy about Joe's absence, went over to see what was the matter, but Joe motioned him to keep away. Just then a rat came out of the pool and squatted for a second on the edge of the ice. But Joe did not shoot, because he knew the rat would drop or plunge into the water and he would lose it. A minute later the rat appeared again. This time it carried a root of some kind, crept up on the ice a foot and after shaking the water from its fur it began to eat. Now was the right time, and by a carefully aimed shot, Joe killed the rat so dead that it lay still

where it was shot. Then with a shout he waved the dead rat over his head.

"I've got him, Ken, I've got him!" he shouted. "Now we're all right."

Without delay the lads trudged home with the rat and two armfuls of cattail chunks. That afternoon they allowed themselves a more liberal meal. The dirt chunks were thawed out near the fire, and after the roots were cleaned and boiled they were both surprised at the amount of starch the roots contained. Joe had carefully cut the muskglands out of the rat so as not to contaminate the meat, and both lads agreed that a kettle full of cattail root boiled with muskrat meat had come nearer furnishing them a square meal than they had enjoyed for two weeks. The remainder of the rat they cut into fifteen pieces, because they figured on fifteen more days of starvation.

Their difficulties, however, ended sooner than they had expected. Joe got three more rats at the same place, and with these added to their stock they were no longer in danger of starvation; although they still adhered to one meal a day, and then could indulge in

little more than half rations. For the amount of meat a hungry man will consume, when he has nothing but meat, is simply amazing.

"I never thought muskrats were such good eating," Ken remarked, "but I think now they are as good as chickens."

"Didn't you know," asked Joe, "that the Indians often lived on muskrats for two or three weeks about this time of the year? They did. The rat's fur is prime at this season. The Indians then go in bands to some good marshy lake or big slough and trap the animals and live on their flesh, because tending their traps and looking after the skins leaves them no time to hunt for other game, and generally there's no other game near muskrat sloughs."

Something now began to stir in nature. It was hard to tell what it was, but there seemed to be a change in the air. Air and sky and trees no longer bore the forbidding aspect of winter. From patches of hillside the snow had vanished by imperceptible degrees, and in other places a thin crust had formed over it. The days had grown longer, and in the morning the odd little nuthatch called loudly from a gnarly elm. Many a time the lads lis-

tened to this little ventriloquist as his call rang out clear and loud apparently a hundred yards away, when in reality he was calling and performing his gymnastic antics on a tree close to the cabin.

And one day the wind swung around to the south. At first it brought a chilling current, as if it were the same air that had so persistently blown from the cold northwest. On the second day it grew so warm that the boy campers left their cabin door open at noon. The next day the snow banks began to sag, little pools formed in the hollows, and from the hillsides little streams came trickling down singing. They united into little brooks which filled the snow on the creek as if it were a sponge, converting it into a mass of slush, and formed a slowly creeping stream on the ice.

Then heavy clouds began to drift northward and the first rain of the year began to drop into the snow through the bare branches and made welcome music, as the heavy drops pelted and beat against the cabin, and sputtered softly in the fire of the chimney place. The next morning a yellow, muddy current

was gurgling and rushing down the creek, shoving and pushing cakes of ice ahead and piling them up in the sharp turns of the bed. But high overhead, Joe's sharp ear caught the distant "caw-caw" of half a dozen large birds, slowly flapping their way northward.

"The crows, the crows!" he exclaimed, as he threw his cap high into the air. "Spring's come at last!"

There was a general cleaning of guns in the cabin. The loads were drawn from the pistols and shotguns and the flash tubes were carefully examined and cleaned. Then every gun was reloaded. Every morning, while Ken made breakfast of a little boiled meat and tea—since the crows had returned two meals daily were allowed at Bald Hill creek—Joe crept cautiously up to the edge of a little slough. The third morning Ken heard two shots in rapid succession, and ten minutes later, Joe, all out of breath, dropped half a dozen mallards on the cabin floor.

"Here they are!" he shouted with a beaming face. "We're done starving at this camp!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Ken, as he lifted up

the clean, plump birds. "There'll be a feast to-night! I'm awfully glad we'll have some decent grub, and don't have to live on chicken feed and rat feed any longer. I guess we have both grown pretty thin and weak. Great Indian fighters we'd make now! Why, Joe, this counted ration plan has made me so weak that I can't walk a mile without being used up."

CHAPTER XXIV

A NEW DANGER THREATENS

THERE was, indeed, no more starvation after the mallards had come north. Within a few days after the return of the first ducks the small and large sloughs within a mile or two of the cabin were covered with so many kinds of water fowl that Ken found it very hard to distinguish them at all. It was easy to distinguish the two kinds of geese. The large and dark Canada geese came floating northward in immense wavy lines half a mile long, while the smaller white snow geese came drifting in flocks which seemed composed of gigantic snowflakes. The whole prairie which had been dead and lifeless two weeks ago was now teeming with life, and the air was filled with wild cries.

The boys estimated that on a scouting trip of ten miles they saw in one day as many as four thousand Canada geese and six thousand snow geese, while the number of other

waterfowl of all kinds ran into tens of thousands.

After the large mallard ducks came the swift, small teal, both green-winged and blue-winged. Then there came the larger red-heads and canvasbacks and the large, long-necked pin-tails. There were also vast flocks of blue-bills: the beautiful, broad-billed shovellers were rather rare.

The boys discovered only now how weakened and famished they had become. The amount of meat they craved and ate was almost incredible to themselves, and they had to exercise a great deal of self-control not to overeat and make themselves sick.

"Why can't we eat four meals a day?" suggested Ken. "I'm just fighting hungry nearly all the time."

"No, Ken, I think we had better not; we'll just eat a goose leg if we get too hungry."

If the lads had not been bound on such serious business, they could not have found a life more delightful and more wonderful. Around them, and to the north of them, although the boys did not know it, lay the greatest breeding grounds of waterfowl in

all the world. Ken thought he had seen a good deal of wild life on the Cottonwood, but he had not even imagined what he saw here. On their daily hunting trips and excursions, the boys not only observed magnificent swans, pelicans, and cranes—the big folk amongst wild birds—and countless large game birds, but they were also constantly in sight of other birds such as the beautiful gulls and terns and the interesting grebes and coots.

As the days grew warmer, the furred sleepers in the earth awoke and crept out of their holes. Brown gophers and striped gophers scurried from hole to hole and turned their funny somersaults at the entrance of their burrows. The larger winter sleepers, such as badgers, woodchucks and skunks, they met almost daily, and when the wild-fowl fare was getting monotonous, the boy hunters varied it with badger and muskrat steak.

Many birds of prey had come to live on the water birds and on the gophers. There were a few migrating bald eagles, many kinds of hawks abounded everywhere, and the short-eared owls were on every meadow.

Almost every day brought some new bird,

but in spite of the abundance of game the lads did very little hunting. They never shot a bird or animal which they did not need for food, and most of their hunting was done with bow and arrow so that they might save the ammunition for their guns.

“It seems like a bad dream,” observed Ken, “to think that we were starving here a few weeks ago.”

There were, however, other matters besides hunting and enjoying wild birds and animals to stir the minds of the two friends. When would White Eagle come? What news would he bring them? Would their ponies ever come back? Were they likely to fall in with any Indians before they found the camp where mother and Marjie were being kept?

Joe thought the ponies might come back if the wolves had not eaten them. He had heard of cases where horses had shown up at camp at the close of winter.

As for Indians, nobody could tell, they might not see one for a month, and they might have a brush with a band of them to-morrow.

“We are not safe from them now, as we were during the winter,” he added, “and

we must be on our guard every day and every hour. If a bunch of them should surprise us, it might go hard with us."

A few days later, as Joe and Ken both sharply scanned the prairie from some low bushes on the edge of the scattered timber, Joe grasped Ken's arm; "Look west to the head of the creek!" he whispered.

There was no mistake about it. Three Indians, each carrying a gun, were headed for the trail, which passed within a hundred yards of the boys' camp.

Quickly, but as silent as hunting lynxes, the boys made their way to a spot near which the Indians would first come in sight of the cabin. Here they hid behind a log about ten yards from the trail.

It was not long before the Indians came along, silent and noiseless, as is the custom of men who are nearly always hunting either man or beast, and who often travel in fear of concealed enemies. As soon as they saw the cabin they stopped and slipped behind some trees from where they intently examined the cabin for some time.

Then they began a low consultation, which

Joe could not make out, although the wind was in his favor. But he thought he caught the words: "To-morrow, make big smoke."

As silently as they had come, but even more cautiously, the Indians started back. Without showing themselves, the boys followed them for a mile, and found that the Sioux had a camp near a little slough at the head of a small ravine, where they stopped and began to make supper.

"I guess we know enough," Joe whispered. "Come, let's go home."

The boys went with more caution than usual; each was busy with his own thoughts, and not a word was said. Quickly, but silently, supper was gotten ready and eaten. A supply of wood, water and meat was carried in, and then, after each boy had carefully examined his guns and buckled on his hunting knife, they sat down on a log outside the cabin, which this evening was left without a fire.

"Well, Ken," Joe broke the silence, "what do you think of it?"

Ken thought a minute longer before he replied:

"We could have killed those fellows deadlier than a doornail, but it would have been a dirty deed. What do you think of it? I guess you are the head scout in this case."

"I think those redskins know all they want to know. The little wreath of smoke over our chimney told them the cabin is in use. No Indian would build a cabin, and they know that this shack can hold only one or two men. So they think they have got us, and coming home with two white scalps at this time would make them heap big warriors in the whole tribe. And the whole thing looks easy and just right for the way Indians like to fight."

"I don't see that it would be so easy."

"You don't? This little fort of ours has one great defect. It has no porthole in the rear. They plan to ambush us from in front and burn us out from behind. Looks to me that is what they meant by: 'To-morrow, make big smoke.'"

"I never thought of this defect in our cabin."

"I did," answered Joe, "but there was no use talking about it. We needed a warm

place to winter in, and had to take chances on Indians."

To defend themselves as best they might was the only thing for the lads to do, and in a whispered conversation they made their plans. Ken was to stay in the cabin, while Joe was to sleep outside, concealed by several logs and bushes about fifty yards east of the entrance to their shack.

"You needn't expect any trouble until dawn," whispered Joe, as he made ready to depart with his arms and blankets. "We'll have them between two fires. They can't shoot you in the cabin, and as long as I'm alive behind those logs they can't burn you. Keep cool, Ken, and use your head, and, remember, no killing unless we have to! Good night, Ken!"

Joe stepped forward a few paces and stopped to listen. Darkness and dead silence lay over the little valley. There was no sound except the gurgling of the creek and the quacking of some ducks in a near-by marsh. Noiseless as a cat, Joe slowly felt his way to his hiding place, and rolled up in his blankets.

Ken had watched Joe disappear in the darkness. It seemed as if Joe vanished like a shadow among tall, dead weeds and brush. No breaking weed or twig betrayed the direction in which his friend had vanished.

"That's like him," thought Ken. "At the game of playing Indian, he beats the Indians."

Ken barred the door, which opened to the inside. The darkness and the solitude oppressed him. Since he and Joe started down the Cottonwood on the night of that fateful August day, they had never been separated for a single night. Through the chinks of the barred door he peered into the darkness and listened for the voices of the night. From the distance far beyond Joe's hiding place came the deep "Whoo-whoo-whoo!" of the horned owl. Or was it an Indian signaling to another warrior? His heart began to thump. Perhaps a scout had been lurking near by and had discovered Joe's hiding place. No, it was an owl all right, but it came close to the cabin. It really gave Ken a scare with its noisy calling, but it was comforting to know that it was only the big

hoot-bird and no sneaking, murderous Sioux.

The boy rolled up in his blanket, but sleep would not come. He could not help listening for the soft footstep of the Sioux scout. There was somebody outside now! He rose up, grasped his rifle, listened, and looked out of the portholes on all three sides. An inky darkness hid everything; not even a star was visible. But there was the noise of somebody or something walking in the dry leaves. Perhaps all three Indians were there!

"Oh, shucks," he thought the next moment, "I have the buck fever or the Indian fever. It's nothing but that fool skunk prowling about with his big black-and-white tail up in the air. He is the only fellow going around here and making all the noise he pleases, because everything is afraid of him, and he is afraid of nothing. I'm going to sleep now!"

At last he fell into a broken slumber. In his dream he went over the whole journey with such a bewildering distortion and confusion of events as only a worried brain is capable of. Suddenly he sat bolt upright. Had somebody tried the barred door? The

boy peered and listened at the portholes. There was nothing but the dark, damp solitude of the April night. It had all been a horrid dream.

But he decided that he needed no more sleep that night. Wide awake, he sat on the wooden bench and waited—waited, waited for the dawn, which, it seemed, would never come.

CHAPTER XXV

A DARING FIGHT WITH INDIANS

WHEN Joe rolled up in his blankets on the ground he did not feel that he was being hunted by Indians; no, he and Ken were hunting Indians. He had slept out like this many times, and had waked up before daylight when he wished to start early on a hunting or fishing trip. To-morrow morning he and Ken might have some early hunting, and the idea of not waking up in time never occurred to him. The night sounds did not disturb him, he could not possibly mistake the rustle of a prowling, nosing skunk for the tread of a prying Indian. With the feeling of a man who knows what he wants and who knows that he has done all that could be done, he soon fell sound asleep. If the Indians wanted to play a game in the morning, he and Ken were ready either to follow suit or play trump, according to circumstances.

As the night was not cold, Joe was perfectly comfortable in his blankets and awoke after a very refreshing sleep with mind and eyes keen and clear for any sharp scouting necessary. The sky had cleared and from the position of the dipper he judged that it was about an hour before daylight. This was about the time the Sioux, like hungry panthers, sneaked up on their sleeping victims.

Without making the slightest noise, Joe felt at the hammers and caps of his firearms to make sure that he was ready for any emergency. It was still too dark to see anything, but he strained his sharp ears to catch any suspicious sound. For half an hour he lay thus and listened, until the stars in the east began to fade. What was that to his right? Just a dead twig falling from a tree, he thought, but he listened more intently.

No, it was not a falling twig. It came from some moving creature—not a skunk, nor a badger, but some creature that moved with the stealth of a cat. Joe could see the weeds move now. Then, in the gray dusk, a

dark figure appeared, and Joe's heart gave a few thumps, but the next moment the presence of danger calmed him. That stealthy, creeping figure was an Indian crawling straight for the logs behind which Joe lay concealed.

Joe raised his rifle. No, he mustn't shoot, there were two other Indians hidden somewhere not far away. He drew his knife. Slowly the Indian came nearer. He was within a few yards of Joe's log. The boy's muscles grew rigid, ready for a cat-like spring; his left hand grasped his hunting knife. The next moment would decide if he could overcome the enemy without killing him. Now the Indian was slowly rising to crawl over the log. Joe could not see him, but he felt it.

Like a wild cat Joe sprang up, and with a rock in his hand struck the Indian a terrific thudding blow on the left temple. Without uttering a sound the Indian fell back among the tall weeds. With pistol and knife drawn, Joe glided over to him. The man lay like dead. Quick as a flash, Joe snatched up the man's gun and knife. Then he seemed to

forget about him; and lying as still as the logs around him, he listened again for any suspicious sounds. Everything was as quiet as death.

When Joe had thus reassured himself, he once more turned his attention to the stunned Indian. From the Indian's blanket, he quickly cut two strips. With one he tied the man's legs to a stout branch, with the other he tied his hands to another branch. Still the man showed no signs of life.

Joe left him and crawled noiselessly to the edge of some willow bushes, where he could see the cabin. Everything was as usual. He felt sure that Ken was awake, but he could make no sign to him. But now, what was that? Two figures were slowly coming down the slope toward the rear of the cabin. One carried a gun. The other—what was that he carried? It was a big armful of wood—to start “the big smoke.”

For the first time since he awoke Joe relaxed. He knew that Indians are superstitiously afraid of falling into a trap, “and



LIKE A WILDCAT JOE SPRANG UP.—Page 241.

still," he thought, "these three braves walk into it like innocent children. They felt too sure of their game."

Now the two stood almost on the roof of the cabin. The man with the gun set it on the ground and listened.

Joe's rifle cracked. The gun stock of the Sioux was split and the weapon tumbled down on the side of the cabin.

"Go for them, Ken, and stop them," shouted Joe, rushing up with his pistol cocked in his right hand, and before the two Indians had time to understand what had happened, they were prisoners.

Without loss of time the boys made their prisoners drop their knives, then marched them over to their bound comrade. The injured man was breathing heavily, but still lay unconscious.

"Better cut him loose, Ken," said Joe.

"Now," he ordered the two Indians, speaking in Sioux, "carry him to the creek and throw some water on him."

In a little while the stunned man revived.

"Now walk abreast," Joe commanded,

“five paces ahead of us. If one of you tries to run, we will shoot him like a dog. We can shoot quick and many times.”

The prisoners obeyed in silence.

When they had reached the camp of the three Sioux, Joe dropped a bullet on the water near a rat house half a mile away. He also fired the shot in the gun of the stunned man, which Ken had taken along. Then he returned the empty gun and one knife to the prisoners.

“You are bad Indians,” he said to them, “and you are foolish. We have had two chances to kill—yesterday and to-day. You spoke evil, you wanted to kill us and make a big smoke in front of our cabin. We knew it. We know many things and we are good scouts, and our guns shoot quick and far. We give you a gun and a knife so you can hunt. If you will walk to the northwest until the sun sinks to-night we will let you go. If you stop before, or if you ever return here, we shall shoot you dead whenever we happen to see you, or we will take you to the soldiers who will hang you. Do you promise?”

"Little white men," said the oldest Indian, "you have spoken true. We were both foolish and bad. You are very brave. We shall never fight you again. You are our good friends. We will walk until the sun sets. Many Indians have killed white men, but we are not bad like Inkpadoota's men. We do no lie, we will go."

"Before you go, we wish to ask you a question, and our medicine will tell us if your answer is true," Joe said in Sioux.

"Where is the band of Inkpadoota and where is Cut Ear?"

The spokesman answered:

"The men of Inkpadoota's band have not shown themselves since the Long Trader drove the Sioux out of Minnesota. They are bad men and have to camp by themselves; they were not at Devil's Lake and we do not know where they are. I have spoken true."

Then they picked up their few kettles and traps and started.

"We shall follow you for some time," said Joe, "to see if you can speak the truth. If you stop to load your gun, while we are fol-

lowing you, we shall shoot you, for then we shall know that you lie and that your hearts are black.”

For two miles Joe and Ken followed within easy rifle range. When they reached the crest of a ridge, the lads sat down and watched the three Indians until they disappeared over the next rise a mile away.

The Indians looked back a few times, but did not stop to load their gun.

CHAPTER XXVI

WILL WHITE EAGLE EVER RETURN?

It was still early in the forenoon when the boys returned to camp to eat their breakfast.

“Weren’t you scared, Joe, when that big Indian came crawling up to you?” asked Ken.

“I don’t know, Ken. I was too busy figuring out what I could do to save my scalp. If I had not hit him right with the stone, I would have stabbed him or shot him with my pistol.”

“Do you think they will keep their promise and stay away?”

“I think they will, Ken. The Indians are about as honest as white men, and these three are afraid of us. They know we had them twice, and they are grateful to get away alive. If they belonged to Inkpadoota’s band of cut-throats I shouldn’t have trusted them, but would have made short work with the whole bunch.”

“Why do the Indians nearly always attack

at daybreak, and why do they never fight in the dark?"

"Early dawn is the best time to get the drop on an enemy," explained Joe, "because at that time almost everybody in camp is still asleep, and the attacking party can sneak up under cover of darkness. An Indian always fights from ambush and exposes himself as little as possible. His object is to kill the other fellow without getting hurt himself, but if he gets cornered, he fights like mad, just like any wild animal will do."

"It's hard to distinguish friend from foe in the dark, and the Sioux, at least, have the belief that if a man gets killed in the dark, his soul will forever have to live in the dark. That kind of life doesn't appeal to the Sioux braves, and that is another reason why they take no risk of being killed in the dark."

After their adventure with the Indians, the boys carefully scouted over the vicinity of their camp every day, and were on the lookout for Indians all the time. On the open prairie they showed themselves as little as possible, and when they did venture into the

open they carefully avoided silhouetting themselves against the sky line.

The fight with three Reds had gotten a little bit on the nerves of Ken, and he proposed that they build a brush tepee and sleep in that rather than in their cabin.

“Then they couldn’t catch us like mice in a trap,” he said.

“No, that is true enough,” retorted Joe, “but they could shoot us like rabbits in the brush.”

From that argument Ken could not get away, and they stayed in their comfortable shack. Building a fire in the evening, however, was no longer permitted.

“We are practically in the enemy’s country now, and no good Indian fighter lights any fires when he camps near the enemy,” Joe remarked.

Twice the lads went on a ten-mile scouting trip southward to look for their horses, and while they found some old sign of horses, they did not find their ponies; however, they felt pretty well satisfied now that the wolves had not destroyed them.

Their most anxious thought was, of course,

whether White Eagle would ever return and how soon he would come.

"We shall wait ten more days for him," was their mutual decision, "and if he has not come by that time, we shall take the trail on our own hook."

"Wouldn't it be a regular wild goose chase?" asked Ken.

"Yes, to some extent it would be, but this is about the way I have figured it out, Ken:

"That band of Inkpadoota is in bad with the rest of the Sioux and they are camping by themselves somewhere in one or several camps. They ought to be somewhere on the Missouri. Most likely they have gone rather south than north. My guess is that Cut Ear is camping on the Missouri within a hundred miles of the mouth of the Apple river."

"And how long do you suppose it would take us to find mother and Marjie?"

"We might find them in a week or a month, and it might take us all summer.

"I do not know the country west of the Missouri, but I have many friends among the Sioux, and we might fall in with some of them. Of course we should do a lot of scout-

ing of our own. We would try to get the good will of some Indian and offer him a reward for helping us.”

“I’d like to know what we could offer him,” Ken replied doubtfully.

“Offer him? Why, Ken, we have enough stuff right here to make an Indian feel rich. Both of us have some money, and we could offer him \$10 in cash. We could spare a pistol, two hunting knives, a shotgun—the one with the split stock—a hatchet, and a lot of little things like needles and thread.”

“Well, I declare,” Ken replied, “you are not only a good Indian, but also a good trader. It would not surprise me if some day you should set up as an Indian trader. If you didn’t have the sandy hair of a Scotchman, I would say you were a combination of Jew and Indian.”

Joe took the twit good-naturedly. “I ought to know something about trading with Indians,” he said. “I have lived long enough at trading posts, and have watched the Indians sell furs and buy goods a thousand times.

“Our whole plan is very risky, but in a

hostile Indian country everything is risky. Some Indian may ambush us and kill us. We have to keep our wits clear and our eyes sharp, and have to try to see the Indian first; then we're all right. We knew of all these dangers before we started, and have gone too far to quit; we'll go through with it now, no matter—"

"You bet, we'll go through with it," Ken broke in. "No quitting for me!"

CHAPTER XXVII

NEWS AT LAST

IN this way the days passed. Both lads were in high spirits and were growing stronger every day, and felt that they were ready for a hard campaign. The craving for an unnatural amount of food had passed away, and they could now vary their diet more than ever since they had had to adopt an all-meat ration. Several kinds of wild ducks began to nest, so the boys could have fresh eggs cooked in four or five different ways—a change which they appreciated. A few prairie chickens had also returned to the country and rabbits were again fairly common.

About a week later as the lads were on their daily scouting trip around the camp they saw a lone horseman slowly appear over a rise of ground to the west. With great interest they watched the dark figure, as first the man's body and then the horse was set

off against the sky line. If other riders followed him, it would mean another battle with hostile Indians, and perhaps with a larger force than they had met in their last encounter.

He approached slowly within half a mile and was still alone. When he had leisurely shortened the distance to a quarter of a mile, Joe sprang up behind the willow bushes, threw his cap in the air and shouted:

"Hurrah, Ken! It's White Eagle! I know him by the way he sits on his horse, and he rides the same little roan he had last fall."

There was no longer any need of scouting. The boys boldly ran out in the open, waved their caps, and shouted:

"Hurrah for White Eagle, he is heap big Indian!"

They almost lifted him off his horse, and again and again they shook his hand and bade him welcome.

"I see by your face, Red Brother," said Joe, "you have good news; tell us quick. Where are mother and Marjie? We have been waiting long."

"They are well, and are in camp on the

east bank of the Missouri, near the mouth of the Apple river. It took me a long time to find them, but I searched until I knew, and they have your message. Your mother's heart is very glad and her eyes wept with joy."

"Did you see any Indians on your trip across the prairie?" was the next anxious inquiry of the boys.

"Not one Indian did my eyes see on the whole trip, and not a sign or smoke of them did I see."

"Good news you bring," answered Joe. "Now we shall have a big fire to-night and make a big feast. We have plenty of game hung up."

"Your talk of fire and feast is good talk, my friends," the young Indian replied with a smile. "I have traveled as steady as my pony would go, and have taken little time to cook and eat, and a blanket on the great prairie makes a cold bed at night."

Never since they left their home on the Cottonwood had the lads been so happy. Ken, especially, felt like dancing and shouting all the time.

There was great story-telling around the camp fire that night. Joe and Ken related their fight with the Indians and their long battle against starvation. White Eagle told how he first scouted through all the Indian camps at Devil's Lake, how then he traveled across the prairie to the Mouse river, and then far westward to the Missouri, on the banks of which he camped, near the mouth of the Little Knife river. During the winter he slowly scouted down the wooded bottoms of the Missouri where deer were quite plentiful. He did not discover the camp of Cut Ear until after the spring break-up. After much difficult scouting he had delivered his message as Mrs. Henderson was getting water from a spring. Then he had started for the camp of his young white friends.

When bedtime had come, White Eagle soon fell asleep in the warm cabin, but Ken tossed about on his bunk and said he felt more like starting on the trail right now than like sleeping. But Joe told him to quit his wriggling and lie still as there would be plenty of work and plenty of traveling before they got through.

“Just count the birds in a flock of geese,” he added, “and you will soon get over rolling around.”

In the morning Joe and Ken began to get things in shape for the trip of 150 miles across the prairie, while White Eagle started out to see if he could find some trace of the horses of his friends.

“I shall ride a day’s journey,” he said, “and may not come back until to-morrow night.”

He did not return that evening. The next day passed, and the two white friends were getting uneasy, sitting in front of their cabin at dusk, when they heard the cry of a wild cat. Ken sprang up with a start, but Joe answered the cry as if the bushes were alive with wild cats.

“Sit down, Ken,” he said, laughing at Ken’s startled expression. “It’s White Eagle, and the cat cry is our signal that all is well and safe.”

In a few minutes the Indian came in sight, leading one horse behind his own. He had found the ponies about twenty miles south of camp. After some hard riding he had las-

soed one of them and the other had then followed him at a short distance. He reported that he had seen no sign of Indians anywhere, and the three friends enjoyed another camp fire in the open, and a warm, cheering blaze in the cabin. Two of the horses they tethered for the night. Joe's horse, which had not been caught, they expected would not roam far away from the other two.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LADS TAKE THE TRAIL AGAIN

ON the following day the three friends left the cabin home on the creek for good, and took the trail across the prairie.

They had made a list of things to be taken along and to be left behind. A frying pan, a kettle, their guns and ammunition and their blankets must be taken, also their hatchets, bows and arrows, a small precious bag of salt and the burnt and tattered tent.

“Sleeping on the prairie makes very, very cold,” White Eagle warned them. “Take all the blankets and all the rags you have.”

The bows and arrows they needed to save their powder and lead, and also to be able to secure some game without betraying their presence by the discharge of firearms.

Ken would not have exchanged the sack of salt for anything he could think of. “When I was at home,” he told White Eagle, “I could never get enough meat, and

mother often scolded me for getting away with a hunk between meals. Now I guess I am being punished by having meat and nothing else three times a day. But think of meat, meat, meat without salt! What horrible tasting slush it would be!"

White Eagle smiled grimly.

"Indian eat him many times," he remarked. "Eat him without salt nearly all time. Meat and no salt much better than no meat."

"We should take all the meat we have in camp," he added in Sioux, turning to Joe. "Then we can travel along as we please and shoot only such game as we come upon without hunting for it. You must also take all your rope and string; we may need that."

The lads took the advice of their red friend, and in the middle of the forenoon they were on their way over the plains.

The sun shone so bright and the southerly breeze floated so gently over the endless stretch of brown grass that the riders could hardly believe that little more than a month ago the dull roaring blizzard had banished all life from the white prairie.

All around them the air was filled with the metallic ring of the meadow lark's song. Here and there the little horned larks trilled their simple ditties on the wing or in the grass.

Every slough they passed was alive with the musical notes of the red-winged blackbirds and the harsh, reedy calls of the yellow-headed blackbirds.

"Yellowhead sing just like rooster," was White Eagle's comment. "He spread his wings and make a little dance on the reed. He say to all the yellowhead squaws, 'Look at me. I am big song chief. I came back from far south. No hawk catch me.'"

The horsemen traveled by easy stages, not making much over twenty-five miles a day, so as to keep their horses in good condition.

"You go slow now," White Eagle advised. "When you come back ponies must run fast, maybe."

When the sun was drawing towards the horizon they camped near a slough where horses and men could easily get water. The saddles were taken off, the horses were tethered and eagerly started nipping the green

grass which was just timidly peeping out of the sod.

There was no wood, not even a sprig of a shrub, and not a tree visible as far as the eye could reach. Two bleached buffalo bones furnished the base logs for the camp fire. With long grass twisted into strands, a blaze was started, and dry buffalo chips soon furnished a small glowing fire in regular Indian style. They had a simple supper of hot tea and roast duck and goose. For half an hour the three lads squatted close over the dying coals. When the darkness had fallen, they put out the fire and went to their sleeping place about two hundred yards from their fire place.

“Wise Indian not sleep near his fire,” said White Eagle.

One blanket was spread over the tall dead grass, each boy rolled himself in his heavy blanket and used his saddle for a pillow, while an extra blanket and the old tent were used as covers for all three.

“No Indian here, no need be scared. I wake early and spy round,” were White Eagle’s last words.

As the night grew frosty the boys pulled the canvas tent over their faces. Protected in this way, and sheltered from the breeze by the tall grass, the tired travelers slept in comfort under the open sky without a fire.

When Ken awoke in the morning he was puzzled for a minute as to where he was. He reached out to feel for Joe and White Eagle. They were gone, he was alone. With a start he jumped up from under the canvas and looked around in a dazed sort of way, when Joe and the young Indian greeted him with a loud, ringing laugh, both evidently thoroughly enjoying his confusion.

"You fellows certainly scared me," he greeted them. "I thought the Indians had kidnaped you."

"We are too homely, Ken," replied Joe jokingly, "but they might have carried you off if we hadn't watched. We have been up over an hour."

"All our young gentleman friend has to do now is to sit down, drink his broth, eat his meat, and get on his horse."

While the boys were eating breakfast and saddling their horses, the sun was rising,

throwing a red glow over the marsh and slough where hundreds of dark water birds were playing about and calling to one another with a strange commingling of voices. From a slope toward the west, came the booming love song of the prairie chicken, and all around the meadow larks were vying with each other, uttering with clear, musical voice their message of "Spring of the year, spring of the year!" In the air the black terns were screaming as they glided about on long wings like swallows, and from the rushes the metallic, flute notes of the red-wings and the reedy cachinnations of the yellowheads swelled the wild medley.

"Isn't it great?" exclaimed Ken. "I never heard anything like this before."

But he heard it again on several mornings. The mornings, days and evenings were much alike, but never grew tiresome. In the great evening concert the deep "whoomp, whoomp, whoomp!" of the bittern sounded like the weird calls of Indian ghosts, and when darkness fell and the birds grew silent the howl of the coyotes wailed through the night, now

far away, and now apparently close to the campers.

On the evening of the fifth day the lads camped once more in the shelter of small timber in the valley of the Apple river, only a few miles east of the Missouri bottoms. No fire was lit here, and the horses were tethered close to the camp. The boys relieved one another at guarding camp, for they had now reached the very border of the Indian country.

CHAPTER XXIX

SENDING A MESSAGE TO MOTHER

THE night passed quietly, and after a quick cold breakfast the three scouts made an early start down the creek, making good use of the cover of such bushes and small trees which usually fringe the prairie streams.

When they had traveled about three miles the young Indian stopped.

"We can't take the horses any farther," he said to Joe in Sioux. "We are within half a mile of Cut Ear's camp."

It did not take long to find a place to conceal the horses. They were tethered on a little meadow completely surrounded by thickets of brush willow so characteristic of the bottoms of the Missouri river.

In Indian file the three friends now crept from cover to cover, White Eagle leading and the other two following him closely. Not a word was said, and there was no hurry. To make no noise, to remain unseen, but to see

and hear everything within reach of his senses is the aim of every good scout, and the boys realized that a moment of carelessness might mean the loss of their lives and the ruin of their whole plan.

After they had traveled in this manner for a time, which to Ken seemed at least two hours, White Eagle slowly raised himself on his hands and motioned Joe and Ken to stop. For a minute he gazed ahead through hazel bushes and over a small rise in the ground.

“What do you see?” Joe whispered.

“Not a thing. The whole band is gone; they have moved camp.”

From various signs about the camping place, Joe and the young Indian concluded that the band had moved about a week ago. A few bones of deer and elk and of smaller animals, some duck feathers and a thigh bone of a buffalo showed what had been the food of the campers.

What could be the reason for their leaving this good camping ground, which was well sheltered, had good water and plenty of wood, and was located in a good game country? There had been ten tepees, but, as

White Eagle had learned from Mrs. Henderson, the camp could muster seventeen men armed with guns. Had they grown suspicious of safely keeping their two captives now that traveling was good and game easy to get? Or had they fallen in with one of the Sioux whom the boys had marched out of camp a few weeks ago?

It was easy to follow their trail which ended abruptly on the bank of the Missouri, showing that the party had crossed to the other side.

The boys decided to scout down river a short distance and look for signs of a camp on the other side. When they had gone about a mile Joe pointed across the river.

"Isn't that a boat near the clump of old willows?" he asked, and his friends agreed that it was.

"Now I think I know what they have done," Joe continued. "Somebody found buffalo on the other side of the river, and the band has moved across to be nearer the buffalo. Didn't you notice that the buffalo bone at camp was quite fresh? That bone and the boat make me think that we ought

to find their camp not far away on the other side.”

For the present the three scouts had gleaned all the information they could use; so they went back to get their horses. Again passing over the camping ground of the Indians, they convinced themselves that the band had not broken camp under any kind of alarm. Nothing but the dead camp fires, a few bones and broken lodge poles indicated the camping place; not a single article of any value had been left behind.

They rode their horses to a place about half a mile below the point where they had seen the boat, and after watering them, again tethered them on a small meadow so well concealed by scrub willow, box-elders and other small trees, that one might pass within fifty yards without seeing them.

Their horses having been attended to, the three lads sat down for a meal of cold goose and rabbit, of which they had cooked a supply for several days at the last camp where they judged it safe to build a fire.

“If we have to hang around here much longer,” remarked Joe, “we shall enjoy

fasting again, until we are hungry enough to eat raw frog legs."

"All right, Joe," Ken replied, "you can have the frog legs. I am well enough fed to fast for two days and by that time I imagine there ought to be something doing."

It was still early in the afternoon when their meal was over and all three agreed that they could do nothing further until dark, because it would be too dangerous if one or all of them appeared in the open.

"You better catch little sleep," White Eagle suggested. "We cross big, muddy river to-night; maybe get no sleep. I sleep, too, but keep one eye open."

Joe and Ken thought this a good plan and rolled up in their blankets while White Eagle leaned against the trunk of a box-elder.

"Don't shut that one eye," Joe admonished; "we don't want to be scalped before we are awake."

"I sleep little bit and wake little bit," said the Indian with a grunt. "No Sioux here anyway. You sleep good; I call you."

After the intense activity of the forenoon Joe and Ken were soon sleeping "good,"

but the young Indian did not sleep "little bit and wake little bit" as he had told his friends; he kept wide awake. After some time he crept over to where he could see the other bank of the river and the boat. For an hour he kept his eye on the boat; nothing suspicious appeared, but his keen senses nevertheless gathered some information. He made his way back to his friends and sat down. A noisy bluejay perched over his sleeping friends and he drove him away.

Toward sunset he roused them gently.

"Oh, you sleep good," he said. "You make noise like mule when he sing. Jay bird come to see who makes big noise; I shoo him away with stick."

"Oh, come off, Eagle, you are lying now. We didn't snore; we hardly ever do," Ken answered, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes, yes; you make noise like mule when he sing," the Indian repeated with a smile lighting up his serious brown face.

"I scout some more," he continued. "I creep over to river, watch boat, see nobody. Think I hear dog bark, but am not sure; wind bad. But I see a little smoke, mile away,

maybe more. That's camp of Cut Ear; I think maybe we find white mother and papoose to-night; maybe to-morrow."

For an hour the lads watched the river from a good ambush. The sun had set, but some Indian might be waiting for a deer to come down to drink, and the three friends did not leave their place of concealment until the darkness was complete.

At last they arose, walked noiselessly to a log of driftwood and carried it down on a sand bar in shallow water; another log which they had also marked during the day they laid down beside the first one. Within a few minutes the two logs were securely tied together and with the aid of a long pole Joe started to push himself and his raft across the river.

Ken and White Eagle waited anxiously. No sooner was Joe out of sight than there was no sound from him.

Ken was getting worried, but White Eagle whispered:

"He good scout, make no noise."

Then a boat appeared in midstream, Joe

paddling it without a drip or ripple on the water. Now he landed.

“Get in!” he whispered. “The thing is big enough for three. There’s another one behind the willows just like this.”

All three of them landed on the other side, pulled the boat out of the water and crept up the bank among the trees.

“We had better scout along,” advised Joe, “and see how close we can steal up to their camp to make sure that this is the band we are after.”

They had not gone far when White Eagle heard a noise.

“Keep still and listen!” he whispered.

All three heard it now.

“What is it?” Joe asked Ken.

“It’s a miserable cur of a dog,” Joe whispered under his breath. “If he makes a noise the game is up and we shall have to fight the whole camp in the morning unless we can work some ruse on them!

“Heavens, Ken! see if you can’t attract him by pieces of your cold meat. Coax him to come up to you and grab him. I’ll kill him

so he won't make a yelp and they will never know what happened to him. He's coming nearer."

"Listen, Joe! He runs like our old Turk. I see him now. He's no Indian cur."

"Turk, Turk, come here!" Ken called and gave a low whistle.

The dog suddenly became rigid with attention. Ken threw him a piece of meat.

"Turk, come here, Turk!" he called again.

The dog came a few steps nearer.

"Why, Turk! it's surely Turk!" Ken called and the black dog fairly rushed upon him. He jumped up on him to lick his face, he danced around and whined, crazy with joy. Joe and White Eagle joined Ken in his joy, and the dog jumped and danced from one to another. To the meat Ken had thrown him he paid no attention.

When they quieted the dog, Ken almost gave a shout of joy at a happy thought.

"Joe," he said, "Turk can take a message to mother. Don't you remember how he liked to play messenger?"

In a moment Ken had fished a very short stub pencil and a dirty piece of paper out of

his pockets. He and Joe crouched under a blanket, Joe lighted a match and Ken scribbled this brief message:

“When can you meet us a hundred yards south of the mouth of the creek?

“KEN AND JOE.”

This was all it said.

“Turk, take this to mother!” Ken ordered, after the message had been put into a short stick, split at one end.

Turk did not like to leave his newly found friends, but after some urging, he trotted off with the short stick in his mouth.

Then came a time of anxious waiting. Would Turk take the message to mother? Would mother find it? Would she be able to send an answer? These were questions anxiously asked by the boys.

Turk had often acted as messenger, but had never carried a message as far as that. Perhaps he would drop the stick before he reached camp.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ESCAPE

“HE wise dog,” remarked White Eagle.
“He carry stick safe.”

“He certainly is,” Joe assented. “But I never thought we would ever see him again. I always believed the Indians had killed him and eaten him. He was out for his evening hunt when we met him. White Eagle, why do so many dogs stray off for a hunt in the evening?”

“Dog, he be just tame wolf. He sleep plenty in daytime; he like to run and smell tracks like coyote and wolf in night time.”

There was silence for a minute, then White Eagle sat up straight.

“I hear dog bark now,” he said. “Sioux camp pretty close.”

Joe and Ken could not hear the bark. Again there was a long silence, broken only by the rustle of some small mouse among the leaves, the demoniacal cry of a loon flying

up the river and the hoarse croak of a solitary heron.

"Joe," whispered Ken, "it is horribly spooky here. If I was alone I'd want to get out of this place. And it's getting as dark as pitch. It's going to rain, too."

"Still! be still!" asked White Eagle. "I hear something. It's big, black dog."

In a moment Joe and Ken heard him, too, and at a low call from Ken the dog came bounding up to them.

Ken felt at the dog's mouth. "Joe, be quick," he whispered, his heart beating fast, "get under a blanket, he's got that split stick in his mouth."

The boys lit a match. There was a message scrawled with charcoal over the boys' note.

"About midnight. Keep Turk," was all it said.

The boys went quietly back to the boats which lay right at the mouth of a small creek and carried the boats a hundred yards farther south. They did not think it safe to wait right at the boat landing place of the Indians.

A blustery wind sprang up from the northwest, bringing a cold, drizzling rain. It grew so dark under the trees that one could not see ten steps ahead. The lads were glad of this change in the weather. The rain would silence the betraying rustle of dry leaves and the wind drowned all small noises, which made the night most favorable for the escape of captives from the Indian camp.

But in spite of these favorable conditions the boys were much afraid that their plan might miscarry. On his visit to the camp a month ago, White Eagle had found out that two squaws used the same tepee with Mrs. Henderson and Marjie. What if these women should be awake until midnight? Or if they should notice the absence of the captives before the fugitives had crossed the river? In fact, many things might happen to break up the whole plan.

Sitting silent in the dark woods, with the wind shaking large pelting drops down on their blankets, it seemed to the boys as if midnight would never come. It was very difficult to judge of the time of night, because no stars were visible. Turk alone was not

tormented by uncertainties and the slow dragging of time. Curled up under the leeward side of a leaning stump he slept as soundly as a dog ever sleeps.

From time to time the boys exchanged a few whispered words.

“What if they don’t come?” asked Ken. “It seems to me it must be long past midnight.”

“We must stay here until dawn,” Joe explained. “If they do not come, we must take the boats back where we found them and hide ourselves. If we do some careful scouting we may be able to learn what the trouble is and make other plans.”

“I think, too, that it is at least one o’clock, but it may not be so late. Time always seems terribly long when you are sitting still and waiting for something.”

Again they had waited in silence for a long time, when Turk raised his head, and looking in the direction of the camp, uttered a low growl.

“Keep still, Turk; lie down!” ordered Ken, as all three boys sat up and listened.

“What in the world can it be?” questioned

Joe. "It sounds like footsteps of horses or some big animals."

"Maybe it's Indians coming after us," Ken whispered.

"Ugh!" growled White Eagle. "No Indian! Indian no big fool, not ride in woods in dark night."

Two dark figures on horseback stopped almost in front of the boys.

"Ken, Joe," a woman's voice called out softly, "where are you?"

The next moment a woman and a girl were lifted off their horses, and no rescued princess was ever as warmly greeted by her lover as Joe and Ken received their lost mother and sister.

But White Eagle had slipped down to the river bank. Hurriedly he pushed the two boats into the shallow water. With his hunting knife he quickly cut the ropes on Joe's raft and pushed the logs into the current.

"Now, quick, get in!" he ordered. "Joe take women! Ken and I swim ponies across!"

Ken paddled the boat, while White Eagle led the two ponies. In midstream, where

the current was very swift, one of the horses became nervous and tried to climb into the boat, but the young Indian hit him on the head with a club.

“You big fool horse,” he muttered, “keep out of boat. You can swim.”

When all were safely landed, Joe put a big stone in each boat; with two swift strokes of his hatchet he cut a gash in both bottoms and pushed the boats into deep water, where they quickly sank.

“There,” he said, “Cut Ear won’t use them to-morrow. And now let’s make a bee-line for our horses and be off for a race.”

When all were mounted, White Eagle, being best acquainted with the country, led the way. With wonderful skill he zigzagged this way and that way, avoiding the impassable willow thickets as well as the low, marshy places. The cold wind was still blowing and the rain came still beating down, and for an hour they could only ride at a brisk walk. Then they struck more open ground and urged their horses to a swifter pace. About two hours after daylight had

come they reached the last clump of trees on the margin of the prairie.

“Let’s rest here a while,” suggested Joe, “and get a warm meal. We’ll not find any more wood for a hundred miles. For the present we are safe. They can’t get men together to follow us before noon, for, as mother tells us, most of the men have gone on a buffalo hunt. And before they cross the river they will have to build a raft, and that will delay them a good deal. They may not get started until to-morrow morning; and they may not follow us at all.”

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RACE ACROSS THE PLAINS

THE party did not hesitate now to build a good fire at which they warmed their chilled bodies and dried some of their wet clothes and blankets. Mrs. Henderson had snatched up a good chunk of buffalo steak which, roasted over hot coals, furnished a savory breakfast for the lads who had been living on cold duck and goose for several days. A liberal allowance of strong hot tea was also most welcome to the three hardy scouts, who had been drinking nothing but such water as they had found in ponds and creeks, most of which was muddy or somewhat alkaline.

During the meal Mrs. Henderson had to tell how she and Marjie had fared amongst the savages. They had been fairly well treated, but she thought that the Indians had often debated if it were not best to kill them.

A few days after they had been captured, an Indian had aimed his gun at Turk, and

without thinking she had rushed at the Indian, and knocking the gun out of his hand, had exclaimed:

“If you ever kill that dog I will kill you.”

Since that day Turk had not been molested. He had always been a great comfort to her as he always stayed with Marjie and lay in front of the tepee when she slept and her mother was away. She had sometimes thought that Turk might help them to get away.

How did she ever get horses on such short notice? the boys wanted to know. They expected them to come on foot.

“Oh, that was not so hard as it looks,” said Mrs. Henderson. “Marjie and I always made friends with several of the older ponies which stayed around camp and which were thought too old and too slow for hunting. We often rode around on them, but were always careful not to make the Indians think that we were trying to escape. I knew it would be impossible to get away during the winter, and after I had heard from you, I just acted as if I liked to live with the Indians and often went visiting with the squaws. So

after I had been to get the horses, I found the two squaws in my tent fast asleep. They had thought I was visiting as usual in one of the other lodges. Marjie and I slipped out, mounted the horses where I had tied them, about a hundred yards from our lodge, and we got away without arousing suspicion. Of course they must have learned that we had fled very soon after daylight came.

“But oh, I am so happy we got away! If we only find Father well and alive all will yet be well.”

“Mother, if he is alive,” Ken broke in, “Joe and I’ll find him.”

After the party had rested about an hour they started again, taking a straight southeasterly direction, and making the horses fall into an easy lope which they could keep up for hours without getting tired.

About noon the whole party again rested for about half an hour. Hot tea and buffalo steak for themselves, and alkaline water and a few mouthfuls of grass for the horses, constituted the dinner. It was quickly prepared on the shore of a small alkali lake into which trickled a tiny spring of sweet water. Buf-

falo chips and coarse grass, firmly twisted into short ropes, furnished the fuel.

As soon as the meal was prepared and eaten, the party mounted again, and once more held their horses to a pace that would enable them to cover the greatest possible distance before night without exhausting them for good work the next day.

About two hours before sunset camp was made for the night—or at least for a part of the night. They felt entirely safe from surprises by any pursuers, as they estimated that they had traveled at least sixty miles. But watchfulness is the parole of good Indian fighters, and the boys decided not to take any chances.

“You make supper, I take a little sleep,” White Eagle said. “When you sleep, I watch, no Indian catch us all asleep.”

This supper was made a sort of reunion feast. There was roast goose and stewed rabbit. On their trip they had picked up two nestfuls of fresh duck eggs. Some of these were boiled, some fried and some scrambled.

White Eagle slept until supper was ready.



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After supper the white members of the party made themselves comfortable for a few hours' sleep, while their red friend guarded camp and watched the horses. Little Marjie was so sleepy from the excitement and the long ride that she could hardly keep her eyes open until she was comfortably tucked in a blanket and she and her mother were covered up with the canvas of the boys' tent.

The weather had cleared after the rain and the stars sparkled bright through the clear, crisp air of the prairie.

Under the faithful guarding of White Eagle and Turk the four whites slept very soundly. From the near-by slough came the calls of many ducks and coots, while the coyotes uttered their dismal howls all around the camp. But neither Indian nor Turk paid any attention to these sounds; they were the usual sounds of night on the plains and bore no message of danger.

Only when one of the tethered horses stood at attention and snorted aloud did the eyes of White Eagle gaze keenly over the waving dead grass, while Turk raised his head and sniffed the air.

About midnight White Eagle brought in the horses and called his friends, and the party resumed their journey, guiding themselves by the stars. They felt that their ability to travel by night gave them an advantage over any enemies who might be pursuing them, but who would not be able to follow their trail in the dark.

On the fourth day White Eagle and Joe began to halt their horses behind every prominent rise and scan their back trail.

“What do you think of it?” Joe asked his friend. “Isn’t it about time to get ready for something? If they followed us, I figure they will overtake us to-day or to-morrow. We got about fifty miles the start of them, but they are likely to have good horses and ride them hard. We can’t make more than forty miles a day, but they’ll easily make sixty.”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE ATTACK

EARLY in the afternoon the party was riding along on the south side of a steep hill, a kind of spur from the hills known as the coteaus. As they passed within about fifty yards of a group of large bowlders, surrounded by some small bushes, Joe remarked:

“That’s a good cover to fight from.”

White Eagle assented with a nod.

A few hundred yards farther Joe turned around the eastern end of the spur and dismounted on the north side of it. “This is as far as we go to-day,” he said, as the rest of the party looked at him with some surprise.

“We can’t go any farther to-day,” he continued. “If the Indians are following us we can’t let them see us first and we can’t fight them on the open prairie. They’ll be more than we are, and if they keep at it they can

wear us out. Eagle and I've been looking for a good place to lay for them.

"White Eagle and I will climb to the crest of the hill and watch our back trail. The rest of the party had better remain here. Ken, you had better tether all five horses on short lines and leave the saddles and packs on them."

Joe and White Eagle climbed to the crest of the hill, and while they carefully avoided showing themselves against the sky line they lay down behind some small rocks and scanned the country along their back trail.

They had been scouting thus nearly two hours, when Joe made out a dark moving speck about three miles away. Very soon both lads saw several dark bodies. It was at first hard to tell whether the objects were moving, but both scouts were soon satisfied that they were Indians following the trail of the fugitives.

Without delay Joe and his friend ran down to the camp. Ken and his mother knew without being told what the boys had seen.

"Ken," said Joe, "I think you had better stay here and keep the horses in readiness.

Keep White Eagle's gun and your pistol, and let us take the shotgun and your rifle. I don't think they will come around the spur. White Eagle and I shall try to keep them busy."

Then Joe and White Eagle slipped around the spur of the hill and concealed themselves among the bushes behind the rocks.

They had not long to wait before ten Indians on horseback came in sight.

"It's the band of Cut Ear," whispered White Eagle, as the horsemen came nearer. "I know some of the horses. They had Indians."

Along they came at an easy lope. They swerved some toward the south, apparently intending to round the spur of the hill.

"Now, it's time!" muttered Joe, and the next moment he fired a load of buckshot at the two leaders.

At the boom of the gun the band was thrown into the greatest confusion. One man dropped and his horse raced wildly back over the trail. Another man also fell, but caught himself again and held on to the horse's mane. Applying whips to their

horses, the remainder dashed out of shotgun range and then wheeled.

“Get down low!” cautioned White Eagle, and a hail of bullets brushed through the low bushes above them and spat on the rocks in front of them; then the Indians threw their horses around again to get farther out of range of the foe that had so completely turned the tables on them.

“At them with rifles!” ordered Joe, “before they get out of range.”

Another warrior dropped, and a horse fell in a heap in his tracks, pitching its rider over its head.

Two pistol shots, although they fell short of the mark, increased the speed of the worsted Sioux; and before they had time to recover from their surprise Joe and White Eagle, unseen by their foes, had slipped around the point of the spur, the whole party had jumped on their horses and were racing northward.

After running a quarter of a mile they turned into a swale on the north side of a second steep hill.

“Great!” shouted Joe; “now we are in

this jumble of hills and can keep out of their sight even if they try again to follow us. But I think they have enough to do to nurse their sores and bury their dead, and some of them will have to foot it back to the Missouri. And I guess the whole bunch will sneak back into camp after dark.”

“Joe, do you really think they would have harmed us?” asked Mrs. Henderson.

“Harmed us?” exclaimed Joe. “Mother, that band of cutthroats would have killed and scalped every one of us now. They have committed dozens of brutal murders, and the only reason they did not kill you and Marjie was that they expected to get a good ransom for you. I am sure that they debated many times if they hadn’t better kill you.

“The fact is I felt very doubtful about your being alive until White Eagle came and told us so. It’s a miracle that you weren’t killed. I always encouraged Ken, because the poor fellow was terribly downhearted anyway. I am not sorry a bit if we have killed a few of this band of red thieves and murderers.

“My only fear was that they wouldn’t come

within range of those rocks. But they never thought that we would attack them or ambush them, and so they just rode plumb into our trap. God only knows what would have happened to us if they had caught us in the open!"

About an hour before midnight the party came to a small wooded stream and made camp. All the horses were tethered in the narrow bottom. No fire was built, and the three boys took turns guarding camp all night, although they felt quite sure that their enemies had given up the pursuit.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A SAD PARTING AND A JOYFUL ARRIVAL

ON the evening of the second day after the fight they reached Big Stone Lake and allowed themselves and their animals a whole day of rest. One man, however, constantly guarded camp, for they feared that small marauding parties of Indians might have returned to the scene of last summer's massacre to pick up stray horses and other booty. From this camp they traveled leisurely along the south side of the Minnesota river, arriving at their own homestead on the Cottonwood river a week later.

But the scene at their once happy and prosperous home was a sad one. The house and other buildings had been burned to the ground. Cattle and hogs had wandered away or had been killed, and the chickens, no doubt, had been carried off by coyotes and foxes.

Rank dead weeds in the garden and heaps of black coal and ashes were the only signs

indicating that people had once lived there.

But nature had already begun to cover with new life the graves of last summer. The prairie was green with young grass; robins and bluebirds sang in the trees and bright orioles and scarlet tanagers flashed through the young leaves of May. But the joy of nature made only more sad the heart of the tired and worn travelers. Their home was destroyed and of their father they had not heard a word. Indeed, they had not seen another human being since their fight with the Sioux. Several homesteads which they had passed the last day were like their own, burnt and deserted.

Next morning White Eagle prepared to leave his friends. They urged him to go with them to New Ulm and stay in the white man's country, but he would not hear of it.

"I am a red man," he said, "and I could never live like white men. I was glad to help you, but now I must go back to my own people. I may never see you again, but I shall always be your friend."

Little Marjie and her mother wanted to thank him, but tears veiled their eyes and

their voices choked. In silence the young Indian shook hands with Joe and Ken. Joe handed him a pistol and he took it, but neither tried to utter a word. Lithely he swung himself on his pony and without once looking around he galloped down the road where Joe and Ken had first taken up the trail of the Sioux. They heard the horse splash through the ford of the river; for a few minutes they heard the hoof-beats on the road and then the sounds became feebler, now they died away, and White Eagle, their faithful Indian friend, was gone.

There was great rejoicing among their friends at New Ulm when four people whom everybody had given up as dead suddenly appeared among them, alive and well; but there was greater rejoicing among the four when they learned that Mr. Henderson, having recovered from a serious wound received in battle, had returned from the South and was now at Fort Snelling, ready to march with General Sibley in his second expedition against the Indians. He had got back his own horses from their first owner, whose place they had reached safely the day after

Joe and Ken had started them on the Mankato road.

Joe and Ken turned several handsprings on hearing all this good news and stormily hugged mother and Marjie and each other.

“We’ll start building a new house and begin planting corn next week!” they declared eagerly.

At daybreak the next morning the two lads started for Fort Snelling to carry the good news of their safe return to Mr. Henderson, while mother and Marjie stayed with their friends for a few days of rest.

And here ends the trail and closes the story of two brave boys on the trail of the Sioux.

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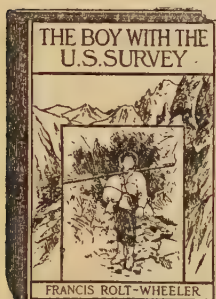
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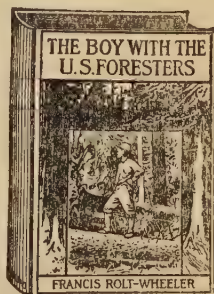
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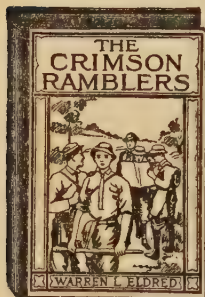
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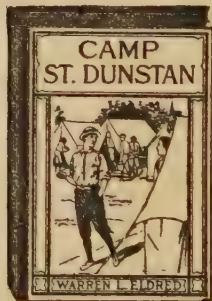
THIS is a story of jolly life at St. Dunstan's School, supposed to be in a village on the Hudson river. During an eventful school year, five close friends in the freshman class, and a teacher of the best sort, plan for a summer vacation in camp in Maine, and being encouraged in a fondness for that best of all exercises, walking, they adopt the name which gives the title to the book, and having gone to Boston by water, complete their journey on foot, with plenty of adventures along the way.

"The boys are active, fun-loving, friendly fellows, not averse to running risks, but always landing on their feet after a fall. Their adventures and experiences form the material of a good story, told with animation and an evident understanding of boy nature."—*The Christian Register*.

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CAMP ST. DUNSTAN is a complete story in itself, although following the fortunes of the "Fearless Four" and their well-liked friend and teacher who as the "Crimson Ramblers" took an interesting trip, partly on foot, from their school near the Hudson river to a favorite camping ground in Maine. A typical summer camp for boys, with all its interesting routine, is described in connection with the story. Interesting new characters are introduced, a mystery develops, and every element of a good boy's story is present. Mr. Eldred, as is well known, is an authority on work with boys, including many summers of camping, and his characters are as interesting as his stories are clean and wholesome.



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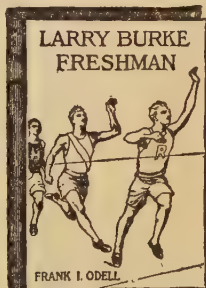
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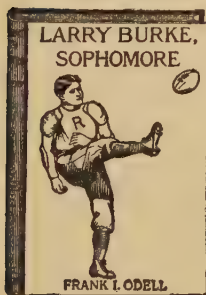
THIS book bristles with activity: baseball, football, ice-hockey, basketball, track and field events, and a regatta appearing, and each sport brought in with expert accuracy of detail, and realism that makes one live over his own most thrilling athletic experiences. Along with this is a charming narrative of student life and comradeship—the golden days that have no others like them. Every boy and man who ever heard of a college can take delight in this book.

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THE leading characters in this book develop along right lines and are worth knowing. Every place of the social and athletic side of a typical American college is entertainingly brought in, with the educational side not neglected, for Larry and his best friends are by no means at college simply to "make" the various teams or have a good time. Mr. Odell knows well how to present a picture of college life as the best type of students know it, and this story makes it easy for others to understand a college man's enthusiasm and loyalty.

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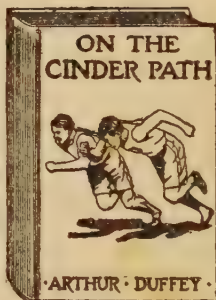
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